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THE LEISURE
OF SOME
WINTER HOURS AT GENEVA,
DEVOTED TO A
FEW SERMONS.

BY THE
REV. GEORGE KENNARD, M.A.
OF ST. ALBAN'S HALL, OXFORD; AND GAYTON, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE.

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TO THE
REVEREND GEORGE BUTLER, D.D.
CHANCELLOR OF THE DIOCESE OF PETERBOROUGH,
AND
RECTOR OF GAYTON, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE,
THIS SMALL VOLUME
IS DEDICATED,
AS A MARK OF RESPECT AND REGARD,
BY THE AUTHOR,

G. K.

P R E F A C E.

IT is with some trepidation that I, who have never ventured before the literary world as a writer, now commit this volume to the ordeal of public opinion. It was suggested by a masterly Reviewer in the Quarterly, on the Sermons of the late lamented Augustus Hare, where the editor lamented the degeneracy of modern sermons; and that from no lack of qualification in the writers, but because they, either, by using abstruse terms, wrote above the capacity of their hearers, choosing argumentative and doctrinal subjects of little real practical bearing; or, on the

other hand, mistaking prosiness for plainness, enlisted none of the graces of literature, and content with proclaiming the truth, made it as little attractive as they could; and thus glided over the surface without engaging the careful attention, and influencing the heart. I think the only scriptural way of trying to reach the soul of a man is to feel his danger as it were your own, and to describe your peace and happiness and joy and assurance in the truths you hold, that he may share them with you; and if this is the overruling feeling in the preacher or writer, he will make his way through every obstacle, because it is precisely the state of mind that God will bless. This has been my endeavour; if I have failed, it has been in the machinery, and not in the spring; and I now offer it to God with one remark. In a small bark I have here

freighted the inmost convictions of my soul : they are my all of earthly treasure ; if it contains his precious truth, and is likely to bring souls to a knowledge of Christ's redeeming and saving love, then I know no sea can be so rough, and no wind so adverse, but that it shall glide over its surface and reach many a distant port, and be again as the angel messenger to the Palestine shepherds, a herald of good news. But if it is not thus, if too little of heaven is discernible, then let it sink in the calmest waters, and be lost in the depths of the ocean.

ΘΕΩ ΜΟΝΩ ΔΟΣΑ.

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SERMONS.

SERMON I.

ST. JOHN i. 26.

“There standeth one among you, whom ye know not.”

AT the birth of our Saviour the village of Bethlehem was one undistinguished in outward circumstances from among all the villages of Palestine, though long ago it had been the native place of Jesse, the father of David, and singled out by the prophet Micah for a remarkable prophecy. “But thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel;

whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." You are aware that, at the time the Saviour was born, an inquiring spirit was generally prevailing among the more zealous Jews; prophecies had been thickly fulfilling, and though this that I have read to you had been delivered for 750 years, yet, as it had been received in the sacred canon, and formed part of their service at least once in the year, it could hardly have been but that some penetrating mind must occasionally have run over in his thoughts the number of his acquaintance in that obscure village, and have speculated with himself if among them was not concealed the future ruler of Israel.

This must have received greater weight when, in the early infancy of our Saviour, so many circumstances had occurred which pointed to that place. There had been—a fact too remarkable to be forgotten—the visit of the angels to the shepherds. Those honoured

persons, selected from out all the world, must have treasured up that intelligence too fondly, and prized it too highly, to have allowed it to pass away. Then to this joyful event succeeded but soon after the trouble caused by the fear of their cruel monarch Herod; and though this tended to draw off their attention from the humble house of Joseph and Mary, by causing their flight into Egypt, yet as Joseph's apprehensions had been calmed by the assurance that Herod, who had sought the young child's life, was no more, we read that he returned into the land of Israel by another way, and came and dwelt in the city of Nazareth. Here, probably, he was unrecognized and forgotten among the children of the place; for it is a remarkable fact, and noticed by more than one ancient writer, that in this change of residence, and now fixed habitation, God had in view a truth which fulfilled a prophecy—that he whom they had looked for to be a king, should be of a despised

and lowly name and place. For at this time Judea, in the estimation of the Romans, was held as the lowest and vilest of her colonies, and *Jesus was from Judea*; and among the divisions of the land no province was considered more slightly than Galilee. “Thou art a Galilean!” and Pilate, with a sneer, when Jesus was brought before his judgment-seat, asked the same question. And on another occasion, when Nicodemus interceded for justice, and condemned the rulers for condemning him unheard, they at one word put him down, by asking, “Art thou also of Galilee? search and see, for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet.” Now the Saviour was of this province. We must add to this also—sinking still deeper in obloquy—that in all Galilee no place was in worse repute than Nazareth. So ill reputed had it become, that even the faith of the guileless Nathanael staggered when he heard that Jesus was of that city, uttering these deprecating words, “Can any good

thing come out of Nazareth?" and yet, with that modesty which in all the history of Christ, even in its minutiae, is so singularly striking, he is far oftener represented as Jesus of Nazareth than Jesus of Bethlehem, or Jesus of Capernaum, which by some of his Evangelists is called "his own city." Even in his earliest life we might say with the Baptist, "There standeth one among you, whom ye know not." There was nothing to distinguish him among the children of the place; his reputed father was a man of no weight—a carpenter, who supported his wife and child by the labour of his hands. All that we hear of him is, that he was a growing boy, a favourite with man and God, and that he was subject to his mother's authority; that he was filled with wisdom, and waxed strong in spirit, and the grace of God was upon him.

The next incident, however, in his life is too interesting to pass by unnoticed. You remember that it was an imperative duty on every faithful Hebrew to present him-

self with his family at stated times at Jerusalem. On one of these occasions we read that they went up to the temple, and returned to their usual residence; and for three days, somewhat strangely, never missed him; which argues but little for their parental affection; for at the tender age of twelve we can hardly fancy how the mother's eye could ever have been drawn off from him who was to be the light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of their people Israel. Most interesting was the situation in which they found him; he was seated in the temple among the learned doctors of their nation, hearing them and asking them questions. It is here that he gives the first indication of the desire of wisdom and knowledge which afterwards he imparted to the world. It was not to teach, but to learn; not to give, but to receive. It is just the beau ideal that we can form of a child—seeking the society of those most qualified to instruct. The sacred writer gives this

only comment, but it involves a great deal: "And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and his answers." We might repeat the text here with great force, and declare, that in that tender child who has so astonished them, there was *one whom they knew not*.

Scripture has for wise purposes, that curiosity might not be too prying, thrown a veil over his youth and early manhood. All that we know of it is, that he followed the calling of his father, and was subject to his mother. It was now when he had attained the age of thirty years, that we find him entering into the busy scenes of the world, to begin and finish that difficult part which had induced him to leave his Father's glory, and to pass a life of suffering and shame, ending only in crucifixion at Calvary. We must transport you to the little town of Bethabara, beyond the stream of Jordan, where John was baptizing. Ignorant as the Jews were of the presence and errand of the Saviour, it

would appear that there was still a busy stir and questioning among them ; for the first scene of his public life was in consequence of a mission from certain influential persons at Jerusalem, who were desirous to know, since the Baptist had departed from the usual line of conduct that the teachers of their religion had followed, whether he founded his claim upon their attention by being Elias, or the great expected prophet. They find him surrounded by a crowd of listening people, who had gathered together to receive from him the rite—the new rite of “ baptism of repentance for the remission of sins ;” and being the special messenger of the Messiah, there is but little doubt that the sum and substance of all his discourses was confined to him who was to redeem Israel. I can conceive no more sublime scene than what is here presented ; and I never read this portion of Scripture without wondering why the master genius of painters—our Raphaels and our Domenichinos—never painted such

a group. You must fancy a desert, composed of the wildest glens, and bare of all trees that could afford fruit or nourishment; for the austere man who frequented it was fed on locusts and wild honey. Picture to yourself a rock on which stood a figure neglecting the usual habits of his race; the locks of his hair long and dishevelled; his beard unchecked; with no covering but a camel's skin loosely wrapped around his loins; and yet the centre of an inquiring and attentive multitude. To the question of who he was, and on what he grounded his pretensions to be their teacher, we remark the diligent care he takes to divert their attention from himself to another, to them yet unknown, and how sedulously he represses the honours that they would press upon him, and directs them to him alone who was worthy to receive them. He said, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord; as said the prophet Esaias, Prepare ye the

way of the Lord ; make straight in the desert a highway for our God." Those who were conversant with Scripture must in these words have, as it were, caught up the echo of the prophet Malachi, when the voice of prophecy closed, and during the four hundred years which intervened between the prophecy and the fulfilment, have now been awoken by the last sounds that closed the canon of God's inspired word. " Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord, and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." Methinks the loud and piercing cry of the Baptist wakening the echoes of the barren place; his solemn words bounding from rock to rock, and piercing to the dark and rugged caverns among which he dwells; the impression of the scene heightened by his wild appearance; these all united would cause each eye

to pass round and scrutinize each fellow gazer, hoping to discover in one of them him of whom the Baptist, in his deep-toned accents, pointed out in those rousing words, *There standeth one among you, whom ye know not*. It is probable that among the crowds who resorted to hear his preaching, there might be found many who had obtained a name among the learned for wisdom, and thought, and intelligence; whose white hairs and venerable persons would attract the notice, and make them to be singled out as the great one unknown. The lighter-hearted ones (ever led by appearances) might fix on one here and there, whose dress, or rank, or station, claimed unusual notice and respect. But there was *one standing among them whom they knew not*—perhaps the meanest there—one where no form or comeliness could excite observation. Grief had not yet marred his features; care had not yet blanched his hair; pain had not yet bowed down his head, or

furrowed his brow ; he was there unlooked upon, unnoticed among that eager troop, in all the prime of human strength, ere it has begun its struggles with the world. He had received the baptism at this time of the Spirit ; the Holy Ghost had descended in the form of a dove, and John had heard those thrilling words from God the Father—happy, privileged man !—which owned him to be the beloved Son of God, in whom he was well pleased. As we read that after his baptism Christ was led up of the Spirit into the wilderness, it may be perhaps lawful for us to conjecture that it was the same wilderness in which John is here described, and that thus the Saviour had already passed through that great ordeal, the earnest of a larger and grander and completer victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil. It is more than probable, too, that as the Baptist pronounced those words, he would fix his eye on the unobtruding stranger, and show him he was recognized. It was

the third interview with the Baptist ; the first, where as children they had met at Mary's house ; the second, where he had been the chosen instrument to baptize him ; here the third, and on the morrow his mission closes ; for he points out the Saviour before an assembled multitude, in those touching and heart-cheering words, " Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world." The morning star that had heralded the rising sun, now sets eclipsed by superior brightness and glory. He (the latchet of whose shoes the Baptist confessed himself unworthy to unloose) had now left his privacy, and had stepped on the platform of public life. The poor and meagre baptism of water, which was all that John had authority to administer, was to give way to the baptism of the Spirit and fire ; he was to decrease, the Saviour to increase. All the notice, all the honours with which he had been unwillingly invested, he took from his brows to lay at his Master's feet.

Interesting as this narrative must be at all times to the Christian, there could not be a time when the subject was more applicable.

My dear brethren, we are assembled on no ordinary day—to celebrate no ordinary fête; it is one that angels must all lay aside their employments to regard and wonder. The minstrelsy of heaven, could we hear it, would probably be trilling those same sweet seraphic strains that first announced the birth of the Saviour; and first and foremost among the redeemed in notice must be those shepherds, whose ears in the stillness of the night were regaled with those comforting words, *Unto you this day is born in Bethlehem a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.* And there, too, is the Baptist, a martyr for the truth. O with what joy must he look up to the throne of God, and see in that holy being before whom every one is prostrate, the Lamb of God, whose blood was shed to purify man from sin; and never surely

was joy more loud in heaven than on the return of this thrice holy and blessed day. Who is there here, that by the testimony of his very presence here is come to commemorate this precious event, who does not thrill in his heart at the remembrance of what the Saviour has done for him and perishing sinners, and meets him now no longer as the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief—as the man that was bruised for our iniquities, and bent under the yoke of sin, and nailed to the cross, and pressed down to the grave, and laid beneath the stone rock in the grave; no; but as the risen Saviour; the chief among ten thousand; the altogether lovely; the King of kings; the Lord of lords; the Prince of peace; whose name is Wonderful; the beloved of his Father; the delight, and joy, and glory of heaven; the sun that lightens them above; the intercessor of sinners; the mediator of the redeemed? O it is a day which spread glory to God in the highest, and

spake of peace and good will to man : and Satan may do his worst, and call up all his powers and principalities, but he cannot destroy the cradle at Bethlehem ; he cannot hush the angels' anthem ; he cannot stifle the shepherds' testimony ; he cannot efface from record the testimony of God, that in that helpless child, on whom the lowing oxen gazed, and whom the littered manger received, is born this day unto us a Saviour, a Redeemer ; one who is stronger than the strongest—mightier than the mightiest—whose name is Jehovah—who has robbed the grave of victory, and blunted the sting of death ; who has made life no longer a burden, the law no longer intolerable, sorrow no longer comfortless, affliction and sickness no longer hopeless ; who has thrown a smile across the valley of the shadow of death, and it started into the light of day ; has strengthened the tottering plank that leads across it ; has provided the rod and staff on which the dying man may lean,

and find them strong, and firm, and sure ; and has stationed the waiting angels on the other side, with garlands all fresh, and fair, and blooming, and garments washed white in his blood, and the harp all ready, and the song all learnt, and the pardon all prepared, and the welcome all assured. Oh, the sweetness of that jubilee to the enfranchised soul that has known Jesus as a Saviour here, to be welcomed by him as a younger brother hereafter ; to be taken out of the crowd, unknown and neglected by them, and to be owned before the angels in heaven as one known and loved by the Redeemer ! *There standeth one among you whom I know ;* what music to the ear and soul to be acknowledged by the great Potentate of heaven ; to look into the book of life, and see his name already there in a page that will stand good throughout eternity ; to feel on his heart the new name written in his Saviour's handwriting, and in his precious blood ! What is then to be com-

pared to this? This is true Christmas—kept in heaven; without one voice to mar the strain, one heart to damp its joy by demerit; all purity, holiness, delight; and he who was most forgiven, now the most loving. O might we ever stay there, and know no check in contemplating and sharing in that ecstasy of bliss!

But we must return to earth, and here, again, assume the Baptist's voice; and to you who for a time have left the world to hear of heaven, and are in the same attitude of eager listeners as the crowd from Jerusalem in the desert of Bethabara; are there not some among you to whom equally I might say, on this very day that the christian world is met together to welcome the Saviour's birth, *there standeth one among you whom ye know not?* O no, you know him not; to some he is an utter stranger; he has passed you by a hundred times, and you have taken no notice of him; he has spoken to you, and you have vouchsafed him no answer; he

has knocked at your door, and you have refused him admittance; he has lifted up his voice and called aloud to you, and you would not listen; he has warned you, and you have not heeded him; he has invited you to his banquet, and one has gone to his farm, and another to his merchandise—anywhere but to him; he has held up to your lips the cup of living water, and you have put it by, and said you were not athirst; he has offered you angels' food, manna from heaven—and you have preferred the quails from the clouds; he has tried to lead you into Canaan, but you have lingered among the thorns and brambles of the wilderness; his cloud offered to lead you by day, but you preferred your own guidance; his pillar of fire in the night of affliction, but you chose rather the meteor light of the world, which led you through mire and over quicksand, ever eluded your grasp, and never led but to disappointment; and all this, not for a day, or a week, or a month, or a

a year, but a lifetime. Shame, shame on you, that the Saviour should be standing among you all the while, and you know him not; his voice still a stranger voice, and what he has to tell thee but a wearisome tale, that does not even excite a question, or thought, or reflection.

Had you but known him that has been so long time standing among you, how different had been your conduct! You would know the gentlest sound of his voice—you would catch his lightest foot-fall; his smallest command had been your delight to obey--his most wearying service (that I should use that word of *his* service which is perfect freedom!) a delight, a liberty, a freedom; the fruit of the Spirit (and if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his) perceptible in every work, smoothing away the wrinkle of care, curbing the curl of the proud and haughty lip, stanching the reddening of anger on the cheek, giving gentleness and kindness and composure

and meekness of gesture ; and then, as to the words, oh ! soft as the falling snow, and sweet as honey, are the lips of him that has been purified by the coal that touched Isaiah's, cleansing from all sin, suggesting only words of truth and love ; he has heard so much and so often the voice of the Saviour, that he has learnt to emulate its tone ; and to such sympathy and harmony with the head does the feeble member attain, that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the one and the other. No harshness, no sullenness nor peevishness, no selfishness, nor guile, nor deceit ; all openness, all frankness, all purity, as the lake that only reflects the blue heaven above ; but then, and then only, when not a wind ruffles it, and when all is smooth, unbroken, and calm, and he who knows the Saviour, from long resorting with him in his actions, will be measured and reserved. The dignity of his inheritance is evidenced in his march and gait, and in his dealings

with the world. No double dealing—all truth, exactitude, promptness, consideration for others; in honour preferring one another; the lowest not the highest place his point of search; his Saviour was the humblest man on earth, and he likes to be his follower. The more he finds himself walking in his path, the more he knows him.

My brethren, that same Saviour is standing among you this day. How many of you to any practical purpose know him? I would put that question with double earnestness, because this is a day of much boasting, and loud profession, and little practical heart knowledge. This is the season which long-established custom and good feeling have set apart for the reunion of families round the domestic hearth, and the gathering together of friends whom we most love; when the stranger is excluded from the circle, and vent given to all the natural feelings of the heart, gladdened at the return of such a season; when old age puts by its gravity, and con-

descends to share in the gambols of infancy, and the sunshine of joy is communicated to the household and dependents, and not a cloud is to be seen ; when, in the unity of the feeling, all animosities which from unhappy misunderstandings have been for months prevailing, are appeased now ; and when the ties that bind man to his fellow-man are strengthened and confirmed. O it is a joyous season when thus kept, and I believe in thousands and thousands of our happy homes in England, so it will be consummated this day. In Germany they have preserved far more than we the scriptural character of the festival, and it is usual for all the members of the family to assemble, and each one from his private purse has provided himself with some little present ; and when he gives it, it is with these touching words, “ Jesus gives you this.” O yes, what gift is there that we enjoy, that comes not from him ? But if, on the other hand, this season is only made the

excuse of unusual levity and frivolity, of feasting and rioting and intemperance, without any reference to the object, then be assured you were never more miserably mistaken, if you think you are all doing honour to Christ. You are desecrating the most heavenly festival of the church, you are perverting good into evil, you are treating Christ as one standing among you, but utterly unknown.

But you, my beloved brethren, who, when the Saviour stood among you, hailed him as your best, your chief, your only friend, who listened to his voice, followed his steps, copied his graces, confided in his word, O how joyful is the season to you ! Keep it as Christians, as those to whom much has been given ; give then much in return ; as those who have been forgiven much, then, like the Magdalene, love much. The Redeemer no longer stands among you, but you know how to distinguish his followers : the marks are too evident to mistake

them. Select from the poorest the most miserable, relieve them from your abundance. Consider the poor and needy, do not lightly treat them ; they are God's image and Christ's, and their places may be higher than yours in heaven. Change places with them on earth ; be rich in faith, and poor in spirit. Make your treasure not here, but where the moth cannot corrupt it, and the rust consume it. Lay it up near the throne of God, at the foot of the Saviour ; your heart is already there, let your treasure be there also.

O remember these words, and go in peace, and soil not the joy and peace of conscience by conduct and trifling unworthy of a redeemed soul. You are at no loss where to find objects on which to bestow your superfluous means. The snow and frost have covered the land, and the hearth has but a scanty store of firing, and the back and bosom are smarting with cold, and the stoutest feet are wandering

over stone and ice, and the basket is but half filled. and the store exhausted, and still there is no complaining in our streets. But there is one above who was once below—who was a houseless wanderer—oftentimes a persecuted fugitive, and he has said, and said it to you, and to all : “ Inasmuch as ye do it unto the least of these my brethren, ye do it unto me.” If you trust his word, and credit his security, you will be liberal, hospitable, and charitable ; if you cannot, you can settle matters with him when all accounts shall be settled between us and him, and where there shall be no appeal from his fiat.

SERMON II.

ST. LUKE, xiii. 8.

“ Lord, let it alone this year also.”

THERE are seasons in the life of the Christian which come with peculiar force and solemnity to the memory : such are all those which in any way have reference to the history of our Saviour, and the state of the soul with regard to him ; and there are seasons in the natural life, which, from association with the other, are but little behind-hand in interest. Such is the opening of the new year, and more especially its first Sunday. The mind, however thoughtless, cannot escape from considering then ; it seems to stand upon an eminence, and to look along and down

upon the journey of the past year ; and then, though involved in mist and obscurity, to shape the course for the ensuing one. And this is no common exercise that can be lightly undertaken ; the great leading points stand out in relief—the sunshine and the shade, the hill and the vale, the smooth and the rough parts, all seem to be unfolded to the gaze at one single glance ; and the heart that can feel at all must beat with no small emotion at the prospect it beholds. The young, who in their spring of life have boded yet no winter, will count up the days of pleasure, its holidays, its pastimes, its meetings with friends, its joyful returnings home from school, its toys, its amusements, and perhaps, with the evanescence of an April shower, will let fall a few tears at the remembrance of some bitter partings, some deserved reproofs and punishment, some evil days, when to their confined view they seemed as the most miserable of beings, surpassing all in trouble and

sorrow. And the aged man will not be less sensible to the touching interest of this day, because of its frequent recurrence; the novelty will not wear away here, but stamp with deeper mark each return. He will draw out to its full length the little span of life, which he knows, if stretched to the longest, will be all that is accorded to him, and he will repine or rejoice according as the time has been spent, when he sees the long space that he has passed, and the little that still intervenes to the goal, and he will contrast his present weakness and feebleness with his childhood's freshness and his manhood's vigour; and he will feel, as the aged only can feel, how sad is the difference; and then he will tell over the number of his former companions that have passed away, and see how few are those still remaining that have any sympathy with him, and perhaps a blush that has its fountain in the heart will suffuse his cheek, and make his withered hand to

tremble ; to feel that the slight, and neglect, and indifference, that are testified by many now, were not so always ; that his tales could once provoke the laugh, and his feelings command respect, and his wishes obtain notice, and his desires attention ; that joy would be testified at his coming, and sorrow at his departure ; that letter after letter would pour in at his returning birth-day, and cards of invitation be liberally sent, when in the prime of life he could give his share to the entertainment of the evening, and be courted for his intelligence, his judgment, his experience, and his wit ; but these days are long gone by ; the old man is considered in the way, his conversation called doting, his tales old and stale, and flat and unprofitable ; his habits peculiar, his demands exigent, his presence casting a chill, a damp, upon the merry hours of the young ; his wants whimsical, his temper peevish and discontented ; the anniversary of the year

perhaps carelessly noticed among the passing compliments of the day, but his own birthday now forgotten and neglected—hardly remembered by himself. A letter is an event *now*—a rare pleasure that calls up a momentary smile on his faded features ; an importance to him that shows itself in his flushed countenance and his trembling hands, as he unclasps his spectacles and composes himself in his pillowed chair, to enjoy the unusual and unexpected indulgence. It may be from his grandchild, written with affection, and duty, and respect ; and all the past rushes to his memory at once, and in his darling boy he sees again his brothers and himself, and for the moment a ray of sunshine flashes across his path ; but that soon dies away, and then the more abiding reflection ensues.—This, perhaps, is the last opening year that I shall see ; I remember too much of the past, not to be without uneasiness for the future. My sins, which once I made so light of, when

viewed by the brink of eternity are seen in their true colours ; and the good actions on which I relied to neutralise them are dwindled away, and I see them nowhere. O the number of mercies that I have wasted, the number of years that have glided noiselessly by ! and now at their closing I see how portentous is the size of the burden of iniquity with which they have been laden fifty years—how many sabbaths—for two thousand five hundred am I accountable, when all the time God was waiting to be gracious, when the Saviour was pointing to his wounds, and entreating me to take refuge in their blood ; and the Spirit loved to impress on me each passing event that was calculated to draw off my thoughts from time, and fix them on eternity. The Bible that I have possessed from childhood, how little known ! With many a book twice as large I am familiar, so as to undergo the severest examination as to its contents ; but with this book, excepting a few striking passages, which

have been sounded in my ears again and again and again, is not my ignorance of it unpardonable? Who was it that wrote it but my Judge, that now when I am coming to my trial I might not be taken with surprise, but know beforehand what were his laws, his wishes, his commands — the penalties and punishment in breaking them — the rewards for obedience? Nothing was concealed from me; every danger that I was exposed to, all set down and exposed, and the hint given, that surely in vain was the net spread in the sight of any bird but the foolish one who was determined to be captured. Was not my heart described as a worthless one that could not be depended on; and the world described as alluring, and beautiful, and lovely; but which, if followed, would ruin me, body and soul? Was I not as plainly told that the wages of sin is death, as any lip could speak; and that all my strength, and vows, and resolution, and promises, were

just as much worth as so many straws; and that if I was resolved to trust to a moral and benevolent life, I should find it a poor preparation when it was receding from me? And then, on the other hand, was I not as clearly shown, by hundreds and hundreds of verses, that what I could not do myself another *could do* for me; who was the highest of all—all mighty; that is, with whom nothing was impossible; and not only that, but was it not added that he who was able, was also *willing* to do everything for me? How often have I heard these words, and attached no meaning to them; looked about me and yawned when they were uttered, and perhaps was engaged in thinking about nonsense that I liked better.

“Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

“The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

“Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”

“ Jesus is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.”

“ Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.”

“ By faith are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves ; it is the gift of God.”

“ Ask, and ye shall receive.”

“ Ask of me, and I will give thee a clean heart and right spirit.”

“ If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will give it you.”

What more could I want than these ? I might have had what I could for asking—have found what I would for seeking ; my heart might have been, O how pure ! my affections, O how warm, and fixed on God ! Here I could not be mistaken, for here is the very book that tells me all this now ; and I have only to think over the number of my friends—my poor father and mother above all, who found their comfort and their truth, and died more as if they were going home to a dear

father to inherit a beautiful estate, to be joined with all they love on earth, than to be attacked by the loathsome creature death, and be fed on by worms. Are there not thousands of ministers who are all agreed in the same story, without any variation? and how many of these have I not heard! Are there not thousands of biographies and obituaries which give the most touching details of life and death, so that the first, with all that the world could add to enliven and enrich it, was looked upon by them only as a stepping-stone to leap over the other, that eternal joy might be possessed for ever; and now they are at rest, happy for eternity; while I—a stranger to all their joys, and delights, and hopes—helpless and ignorant as a child, my heart unchanged, death before me—no hand, no staff to uphold me?

Though, thank God, there are multitudes to whom these words apply not, yet, alas! such has been the confession and feeling of thousands, and at no time more impressively than at the opening of

the new year, when Time with his iron grasp drags them from carelessness, and *makes* them think.

But so far I have but spoken generally ; there is, however, something so pointed, so arresting in the text with which I have prefaced these remarks, that we must proceed to its more minute examination.

The whole occurrence could not be more plainly, simply, and shortly related than in the words of Scripture :—"A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard, and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none ; then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none : cut it down : why cumbereth it the ground ? And he answering, said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it, and if it bear fruit, well ; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down."

This is one of those passages that cannot possibly be mistaken, whose drift the

meanest capacity may take in. It is one that we ministers, when it is our duty to discuss, feel, more than for any other, the awful responsibility of our office; for it would seem to common sense so fraught with terror, and yet so persuasive and convincing, that out of five hundred persons to whom they deliver and enforce it, it could not be, on the principle that men will be guided by common sense and their own interest, that one of them should hesitate immediately to act on it. And far therefore was Melancthon from being chargeable with folly and enthusiasm, because when once in the study, as it were at a single flash, the whole Gospel of Christ was revealed to him—"God reconciled with sinners by the sacrifice of his Son"—so elate was he with the discovery, his heart so overflowing with gratitude, his desire so ardent to tell it to his countrymen, that he seized up his hat and mantle, and ran out into the streets, and stopping the first man he met, he told him all that he had felt himself, and that he too might share

it with him ; and the man laughed in his face, and thought him a fool, or a mad-man broke loose : he tried it with another, and another, and another, with earnestness still increasing, his full heart overflowing with tenderness—but it was ever with the same effect. The tears of love now changed to the sobbings of sorrow, and smiting his breast, he poured forth that piteous cry, “ Alas, alas ! the old devil has more influence and persuasion than young Melancthon.”

Shall I find it so ? O God forbid ! Thou Holy Spirit, who alone canst command the word of God, and make it a savour of life unto life ; who alone canst wield that weapon that is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, that pierceth even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and can cut to the thoughts and intents of the heart ; take the sword into thy hand, strike it against the sinner whose soul is not open to conviction, who has been called to thee, but will not hear thee.

Make him, force him, oblige him to hear thee now, and let not one single soul leave these courts unwounded by thy arm. O hear me for his sake, that is pledged to offer up our prayers ; hear me for thy own sake. Thou Spirit that convertest, that art pledged to intercede for us on earth, hear me. O thou heavenly Father, who hast the hearts of all in thy hands, and canst mould them into any shape thou willest, hear me, that this may be a memorable day in each of our histories ; that many, that all who hear thy word, may be gathered into thy fold and made thy children. Amen.

The proprietor of a vineyard had for three years visited a fig-tree which had received the same advantages as the rest—the same culture and the same care ; but all had been apparently thrown away, for he could find no fruit upon it, though for six seasons he had sought it. The fig-tree, you are aware, in eastern countries yields fruit twice a year. Now this was very different from what he had a right to expect ; nothing had been spared to make

it fruitful ; the vine was a choice vine ; none other than those are ever found in his vineyard ; it had not been neglected by the dresser, the season was not past ; it was the time for fruit, and fruit it had none. It was only taking up the room of another plant that would not be so barren ; and as he had not shown any impatience about it, if ever the vine was to bear fruit, surely after three years' trial it had had ample time to prove whether the cause was only momentary or radical. I think that none of you who are fond of the culture of trees, have bestowed more pains and patience on a barren tree on which you had watched and tried all expedients for three years to make it bear, but in vain, and still persevered. Accordingly, the master of the vineyard only acts as you would act ; he calls for the dresser of the vineyard, and having assigned the reason for his decision, desires it may be cut down. But here he is unexpectedly met with an obstacle ; the kind, patient dresser, who

has had all the care and vexation and disappointment, in seeing so much of his time and skill thrown away to so little purpose, who, one would expect, would have been the last to say a kind word for it, having probably so many younger plants that he could put there instead, which would save him all anxiety and uneasiness, and reward him with plentiful produce, yet it is he who pleads with the owner in those touching words, "Lord, spare it this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it, and if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down." The dresser here shows the kind patience and long-suffering of his character, that seems inexhaustible, so far as depended on him, and only limited by obedience to his Master, whose will was law to him. *We do not hear if the request was acceded to—Scripture has been silent.*

Now the spiritual signification of all this remains to be given. God the Father has marked out a portion of this world in

which he takes special delight ; it is not because more pleasant, or more fertile, or more rich ; for it was poor and miserable, and good for nothing ; rugged, and stony, and briery : but wherever God shows his favour, a great change succeeds ; and as he had chosen this, the character immediately changed to what he approved ; he calls this in one light a vineyard, in another a church, an inheritance ; it is, however, with the food only that we have to do this morning. Well, in this vineyard he has trees, whose abundance of fruit gladdens and refreshes him, and he has pleasure in seeing them and gathering their rich clusters, but among their number there is *one* mentioned.

I hardly dare continue, the contrast in the reality is so strikingly painful. Here there is only *one* that is barren ; one soul that does not return the good it has received ; has been a prodigal ; has despised the father's commands ; has lived not for him, but for himself ; has produced no

fruits of righteousness ; has been averse to everything that is holy ; has been positively nothing more nor less than a cumberer of the ground ; and this not merely from the freak of youth, the outbreak of a season, but for years it had been so ; the eye of God had been on him all the while ; and the discipline to bring him around was resorted to with special care ; and he was handed over to the Son, the blessed Saviour, whose office in the church, as the great head, is to lead the weak and feeble member to the Father. This had been the work of years, but all in vain. The Father, who knows its most minute history, nothing having been concealed from him, becomes weary, and tells the Son to withdraw his grace and intercession ; for while that lasts he cannot strike, and he will destroy it, root and branch, body and soul. But here the tender Saviour, the indulgent, forgiving, never-wearying Jesus, raises his supplicating voice, and in accents that find their way to the Father's

heart, begs for another year for the poor deluded, perishing, and sentenced soul, and says he will try, as it were, again, if he cannot succeed. He will dig about it; he will open the recesses of the heart, and make bare the roots, which are the motives, the conscience, the springs of action; he will reveal the hidden corruption; he will try to cleanse it with his blood; to graft it with a better branch; but if, after all his pains and diligence and care,—then he must leave it to the wrath of God.

Now of how many here is this the history? I speak to each one of you, as much and as directly and as exclusively, as if I had singled you out from this number, and taken you into a closet and shut to the door, with no eye upon us both, but his that never shuts upon us. Let us have no concealments, no subterfuges, no equivocations, no reserves; I do not speak of another; I speak of thee, old man; of thee, O youth; of thee, aged matron; of

thee, young wife, young bride, young girl, young child. I say nothing to one that does not apply in some degree to all; where there may be a difference, can only be in the difference of time that the Father has looked down, in vain seeking fruit; so that they who have lived the longest have the most provoked him; but the very youngest has a terrible account to render. How, then, how stands the account? how many years has the Father been looking for fruit without finding any? What excuse can you allege why you are barren? Have you had no culture? have you had no grace, no assistance, no care taken of you? have you had no kind mother, no careful father, no affectionate brother or sister or aunt, who have struggled to win you to God?—and you have resisted all. Have you had no dresser to cultivate you? no Saviour to die for you, to teach you, to cleanse you? Has he not tried to get at the root of the disease; to enter into the centre of the heart, and expel all corrup-

tion ; and have you not done your best to keep him out ? Has not the Spirit again and again arrested your thoughts in a sermon ? is he not doing it now ? trying to recall your thoughts from everything, and fixing them all, entirely, exclusively, unalterably, on him ? Has not the Father invited you by all the instruction for your benefit that he has charged upon his Son on your behalf, by the permission he has given him to use the means for your recovery which he has ? Is not the Bible his book, containing his word ; giving you helps, and appliances, and aids, more than you have ever had need of ? has not his supply been always larger than your appetite ? the fountain of living water always fuller than your thirst could exhaust ? What is there wanting ? And this has been going on for one, two, three years with the youngest ; with some, fifty, sixty, seventy years. And now the last year is closed to many : it may be the third year to many of you. The conversation be-

tween the master and the dresser may have been repeated in heaven. With some the year that was conceded only to the petition of the Son, may be already hastening to its close, and the arrow may now be on the string which is to strike you dead ; the seed of death may now be sown in the heart, which is to ripen into the grave ; to such, when this has happened ; when even the dresser has exhausted all his pleadings, and given over his remonstrances ; whose third year spoken by the Father, and whose fourth year begged for by the Son, have gone by, and still no fruit ; it is in vain for me to speak to them ; their lot is cast ; they are beyond mercy, beyond forgiveness, beyond hope.

But to those on whom the opening year brought only the third—O let me speak to you with earnestness and affection, as if it were the last ; you cannot say it is not—live as if it were—you will not be less happy for having God the

Father loving you, and the Saviour smiling on you with approbation, and your branches hanging with fruit. O do not, I implore you, for the value of your never-dying souls, abide in present impressions. Go back with me to the commencement of the past year—recall the solemn vows, and resolutions, and promises you made voluntarily for amendment, and have you not broken them nearly all? O, then, be distrustful of yourselves; your safety and your salvation lie in having no confidence in yourself; the slightest speck of self-assurance, if you maintain it in your heart, is large enough for Satan to lodge his foot—to place his lever, which shall overthrow you. Be humble, be gentle, be resolute to depend on God alone—on his Son for pardon, on his Spirit for cleansing. Now is the most seasonable time for laying new plans and acting on them, giving up bad habits, weeding your library, and burning all exceptionable books; forsak-

ing all evil company, all worldly company ; giving up all idle practices, self-indulgence, vanity, pride, bad temper. Set apart a portion of your savings for charity ; be liberal, be wise, be judicious in your spending it. Draw in writing certain rules for every-day guidance, which once a week make a point of reading over. Wind up your accounts with God and man each evening before you lay your head on the pillow, and your sleep will be sweet. Set apart certain portions of your time for private prayer for special objects ; be not vague in your petitions, do not use cant or hackneyed words and phrases ; be sincere and upright with God. You are not speaking as a slave to a tyrant, but as a child to his father. You cannot be too plain ; and remembering he is in heaven and you on earth, and that he is the Being before whom all the universe bows its head ; you cannot be too familiar : his closet is ever open to receive you ; his ear ever attentive to your shortest cry, his

hand always full of mercies ; you have but to open yours, and he will relax his fingers, and you shall be laden with mercy. So far as they will last, I have placed in the vestry thirty or forty little tracts containing heads for prayer on some the most vital points of christian life. Such of you as love the Redeemer and his people, and would like to possess them, have only to apply for them. They are used by many thousands in our beloved country, who every Saturday morning, from seven to eight o'clock, devote an hour to prayer. Surely there is nothing more like heaven than this voluntary vow, and I am sure God has blessed us, and will bless us. The more we lean on him, the more he will support us ; only let nothing induce you to relax when once you have put your hand to the plough. If circumstances oblige you occasionally to shorten your petitions, still, before the week is over,

let their fervency and length be made up ; and for those who are heads of families, and assemble their children and dependents for morning prayer, nothing would be more useful than to make the heads of subjects furnished in that little tract the subject of their united petitions.

Let me therefore press on you what is the leading idea of this sermon ; that if, by your continued barrenness, you exhaust the four years of the Father's forbearance, and the three years of the Saviour's training ; in other words, if you neglect the appointed time, the accepted time, the day of salvation, you can expect only one result ; and it will be in vain to murmur, for it was your own allotment. You have had your time, and then God will have his ; and God's time was one of mercy, but now of justice. And ask yourselves this simple question, What probability is there that justice will avail where mercy has condemned ? and let

your life and conversation this year, that now is passing rapidly away to join the thousands that have preceded it, be the answer of a prayerful, loving, obedient child of God.

SERMON III.

ST. JOHN iii. 7.

“Ye must be born again.”

OUT of the many mysterious passages of the Bible which have been stumbling-blocks to the man of the world, there is none that has been advanced and discussed more frequently than the doctrine involved by the text. Other difficulties have been abandoned one after other, but this has been returned to as a defensible point which nothing could carry, a trench in which the weakest soldier might find shelter and defence; and yet, strange to say, perhaps no single passage is capable of more easy explanation, none more reconcilable with common sense, none

more in analogy with what we observe in nature. If you notice the language of the Saviour in introducing it, it seems to express astonishment that Nicodemus, a master in Israel, should not admit such a simple fact as this ; and he goes on to say, that what he had advanced was only under the class of earthly subjects, which he wondered a man of education and intelligence did not believe ; and he feared he would find greater difficulty when he came to discourse on heavenly things. All this is deducible from the following verses : “ Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things ? If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things ? ” Things passing every day under your eye must convince you of the truth of what I declare. Hark at the moaning wind which sweeps along the silent streets of Jerusalem, when all the hum and sound of busy day are hushed. You feel its power, and yet you cannot

tell whence it comes, nor whither it goes :
“so is everyone that is born of the Spirit.”
He knows not whence the new nature proceeded ; he knows not whither it will lead him ; but he feels there is a mighty, life-shaping power within, which he had not once, but which is strong and powerful now—which nothing can stay, nothing subdue, nothing turn aside from the quarter whence it is directed.

Here we have the details of the occurrence which it is needless to carry to greater length. The great teacher proclaimed a momentous truth, which here it will be my province to repeat and enforce. *Ye must be born again.*

And now, as he declared it was only an earthly truth that he was delivering, it must be by earthly illustrations that we must seek to understand it. A nature can never change itself ; what it is in essence it must remain. Change of circumstances can here in no way influence. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that

which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Compound or composite substances may be resolved into simple or primitive ones, but the primitive ones themselves are unchangeable. The introduction of a foreign power may change its character, but in itself it continues as it was. Light is light, and darkness is darkness, and when light prevails, then darkness ceases ; but light can never become darkness, nor darkness light. But the field of nature will give us a better example. There is a laurel and an apple tree ; there are properties peculiar to each which are incommunicable. They may grow in the same soil, their stems may be bound closely together, their branches may entwine ; the same sun diffuses his rays, and the same shower moistens their roots, but grow they a day in this position, or a year, they will still continue different trees : the laurel will be still a laurel, the apple tree still an apple tree. And if we cut from the stem a branch and bend it on the

other, so that the sap of the root should climb to feed the engrafted branch, still the branch, the representative of the parent tree, will remain the same, and the root be unchanged. And even here the analogy is very beautiful and striking ; for though now closely cemented to another tree, and nourished by its juice, all the buds that burst out below the graft will partake of the old nature, and the fruit only will be good that is gathered above the graft, or which is yielded since that union has taken place. By what gentle yet powerful hints does the Spirit make use of things natural to teach us things spiritual ! For is it not so in the Christian's life ? Is it not the language of one of our Articles, that works, before the grace of God has taken possession of the heart, profit nothing ? And does it not say also, that the infection of nature remains even in the regenerate, which may be likened to the buds and sprouts which are continually putting forth from the old stock,

which it is the care and vigilance of the gardener to cut out as soon as ever they appear. Take even the seeds of the two trees ; confine them to the same narrow spot ; give them the same culture, and let them grow till, in their return, they produce fruit again ; still the laurel will be the laurel ; the apple tree will be the apple tree ; the one will produce apples, the other berries ; you cannot change the nature. There is so much self-evident truth in this, that I will not occupy your time by pursuing the illustration farther. Now, then, what do we gather from this ?

We have, in the great God above us, the Maker of heaven and earth, a God of such purity that the very angels veil their faces, so dazzled with his glory, so eclipsed by his holiness. All that he delights in must partake of his nature, for he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity ; and inasmuch as he is the centre of all perfection, all must revolve round him ; happiest they who are the nearest to him ; but

they who derive their light from other sources, obey other impulses, are guided by other laws, pass not within the orbit where his grace shines, know nothing of his goodness, rejoice not in his favour, are aliens to his happiness. For he is a jealous God ; that is, being worthy of first thoughts, first affections, first consideration, he cannot brook a rival, be it what it will ; he must have all or none ; he must be first or nothing ; the heart must be all his, or none of it ; no reserve, no lurking-place for another. Now, then, if such is the character of God, let us see what is the character of man, that we may judge what harmony there is likely to be between them. Keep in mind what we have already advanced and proved, that there is no changing a nature—that it is and must be unalterably the same. We have, therefore, only to take a few of the principal features of man, and hold them up to God's divine mirror, to see if they are reflected, lineament by lineament, touch by

touch. If there is identity and resemblance, then our search is over, and we close our inquiry with this blessed conclusion, that God and his creature are one in nature, and therefore one in pursuit, and happiness, and glory.

But, if it shall be seen that the contrary of all this is the truth; that instead of identity there is opposition; instead of unity, discord; instead of attachment, enmity; instead of oneness of purpose, diversity; it will be evident that there can be no alliance between the two contending parties; and before there can be unity, one or the other must change, possess quite a different nature; in other words, be cast in a different mould, be born again of another seed, shaped after another model. And this must take place either in God or man; for light will as soon blend with darkness, and become identical, as sin with holiness, as flesh with spirit; but God cannot change, therefore man must. And now, before this change,

what is man ? What is his master-feeling ? What is the character of his nature ? Let us, before testing him by what we see, and by what we feel, see his picture in the word of God.

The carnal mind is enmity against God ; it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. They that are in the flesh cannot please God. They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh : the law is spiritual, but man is carnal, sold under sin ; what he does he allows not, and what he would he does not, and what he hates, he does ; in his flesh there dwelleth no good thing ; the law in his members wars against the law of his mind, and brings him into captivity to the law of sin which is in his members, and he cries aloud in vain for some one to deliver him from the body of this death. The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the works of the flesh are these : adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred,

variation, emulation, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like; and they who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. Look at man under three more aspects, with reference to his heart, to his tongue, to his tastes and habits. With regard to his heart—he who best knew what was in it said, it was the source of evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. With regard to the tongue, the apostle speaks of that member, which more than all the rest was the organ of intelligence, which was formed to utter words of truth, to proclaim the praises of God, to tell of his loving-kindness, and to rehearse his mighty deeds; and what is his description of it? it is a little member which boasteth great things, a fire, a world of iniquity, defiling the whole body, setting on fire the course of nature, set on fire of hell, the only thing that has mocked all art and cun-

ning to tame, an unruly evil, a deadly poison, created for a pure and pleasant fountain that should well forth a ceaseless stream of blessing, but now polluted even in its spring, and casting forth only what is disgusting, loathsome, and filthy. Look to him with regard to the world, that world of which he who most of all the apostles had drunk of his Master's spirit, from whom, least of all, words of detraction can be expected, has expressly said that we are not to love it, neither anything belonging to it ; that if we love it, the love of the Father is not in us ; for all that is in it, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life, is not of the Father, but of the world ; and the world passeth away with its lusts and its lovers. And to throw it into greater shade, we know who it was that declared that while no man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one or love the other, or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other ; so if any man love father or mother, or wife or

child, more than him, he is not worthy of him. Weigh well these words, The father that has begotten thee, that has waited for thee to give thee nourishment, that has instructed thy youthful mind and developed all its faculties, that has sheltered thee from danger, that has enriched thee with his hard-earned wealth, and placed thee where thou art, that father must be thrown from the pedestal where God is erected ; and thy gentle mother, who, ere thou knewest the blessings of life, bore thee in her bosom ; for thee passed through a time of suffering and peril, and thou all helpless and unconscious, fed thee at her bosom, robbed herself of rest to watch for thee, sat by thy couch when sickness disabled thee, bore with all thy fretful words and impatient tempers, soothed thee when thou wert sorrowful, protected thee when others chided thee, was as the chicken's wing that shadowed thee, and bore unmoved, uncomplaining, the shafts that were directed for thee—O, if there is any-

thing in this fallen world that resembles heaven, it is the never-wearying, the unselfishness, the deathlessness of a mother's love ! And yet that must be surrendered ; there can be no partnership, no association of what is earthly and spiritual—God all in all—nothing kept back. One thing needful must be purchased at the cost of everything. A mother—thy mother, O doting child, must be hated in comparison with thy God. And now what scene presents itself that gladdens the heart even in the distance ? ere his little footfall that hardly crushes the flower of the field is heard, and the eye that glistens with love and intelligence, see the child round whom the mother's heart is bound with links so fine and delicate that to sever them would be to extinguish life itself—see the pride of the father, as he lifts him up and clasps him to his beating breast ; and then hear that voice which pierces the clouds, and says, That child is mine ; I gave him, and now I ask him of thee ;

take him to that hill, where all is ready, and sacrifice him, and let the mother hold him while the father strikes him. I ask not more from thee than I once asked of another, and he was faithful, and did not flinch. I ask no more of thee for me than I did myself for thee. What say you? will you, can you stand the test?

Now it is evident that if you have the nature of God, everything that he asks of you will be agreeable to your will, for the same nature will have the same desires; and whether the request be galling to the flesh or pleasant, it will not enter into consideration as affecting obedience. To sit on the throne of England, or to sweep the streets of London, as the excellent Mr. Newton said, would be a matter of perfect indifference to two angels to whom these several commands were given.

Now, then, how stands the matter with each of you? what sympathy is there with God in your tastes, desires, likings, dislikings, habits? have you the same na-

ture as he ? because, to become like him—it is not education—it is not privileges—it is not association—it is not a sacrament—it is not a moral life—it is not a religious one—you must be changed in principle, in heart, ere the christian life can begin—*you must be born again.*

As our Saviour said it was only earthly things of which he was speaking, I will still confine myself to earthly illustrations. We will suppose that God will have none but the real myrtle in his plantations, paradise ; but you are a laurel. You may change your position, and go and place yourself where only myrtles are growing, but you are a laurel still ; the same sun shall shine, the Sun of righteousness shall throw over you her rays of grace, the same showers descend on you both, the same Spirit come down in power to converse, to warn, to animate ; but they will leave you as they found you, not a myrtle, but a laurel. The gardener will enter, and with his knife will lop off the excres-

cent branches, and cut out the dead wood, and hold up the leaning stems, and twine the laden flowers, and gather the ripened fruit, and he may throw them into the basket, and their scents may intermingle ; but when he comes with them to the master of the garden, do you think that all these artifices will deceive him ? With the one he will deck his garlands and adorn his bowers, and the other will serve only as fuel to heat the preserving houses of the other.

And now for the spiritual signification of what I have said. It is to no purpose that you can allege that you have been born in the same christian land ; that you have had the best christian instruction ; that you have frequented the society of the chosen favourites of God. It will profit you nothing that your dead works have been cut away ; that God has poured on you his mercies ; that the Spirit has deigned to reason, and plead, and implore you ; it will be nothing that the

gardener has trained you, that God has checked your rampant growth by trials and afflictions, has pressed you down to the stake, has restrained you from roving, has cut off what was corrupt, has held you in the sunshine of his arms, has bedewed you even with his tears, has tried to wash away the canker with his blood. You are the same, the same helpless being that was ushered into this world by piteous helpless cries. You are as feeble to produce the new birth, to change the old nature, as the first hour of your life. The Ethiopian cannot change his skin, the leopard cannot change his spots; to be another man, you may struggle how you will; it is earth, it is heaven—it is God himself that says, *You must be born again.* There must be a new principle implanted; the root must be dug up and changed; a new seed sown; a new birth take place. You have only flesh, and that which is born of the flesh is flesh. You must have the life of the Spirit; God must be your hidden

father ; you must grow unto him by faith ; you must be adopted into his family—made one with Christ. Christ is all in all with God ; there is no hope out of him ; there is no death in him. Where Christ is, there is liberty ; there old things pass away, there all things become new ; there what the flesh alone winces at, the new life finds pastime and enjoyment ; the yoke which bowed down the heavy laden sinner becomes a garland of flowers, and the commandments of God in all their breadth, which seemed so grievous, which exacted so much—O, they are the very life, the very existence, the very enjoyment of the regenerate. He is born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible ; he is destined to flower and ripen in a paradise where no decay can come, where no sun will set, where no blight will wither. The very sap of life eternal rises and runs through his veins ; he is a branch of the heavenly

vine; he is a tree planted by that hand that never plants in vain.

But there is one part of my subject yet untouched, without which I dare not have uttered the preceding. Is there any faint and feeble and trembling soul here who fain would cry, If this principle of life on which you lay so much stress, without which you declare we shall all perish, this new birth which introduces a new order of things be such; if no act of ours can produce it; what avails a life of self-denial—a series of services that even in the letter we find galling to the flesh? Why, if, after all my struggling, I can do *nothing* to save my soul; to communicate a new birth, a new being; do you still urge on me exertions? I do indeed desire to have my nature renewed, my sins forgiven, a new life implanted; but how can I, who am but dust and ashes, move and influence a God who is unchangeable?

O happy the soul that is in such a state

of yearning. The very desire you testify to throw off the evil nature, and to be clothed in the new, comes from God. Do you think Satan put such a thought into you? and from what you know of the workings and deceitfulness of your own heart, do you think it likely that that is the parent of such a feeling? Is not the very dread of being cast away a proof of God's Spirit striving within you? is not the sorrow that you love God so little, the most conclusive proof that you *do* love him something? Were you to enter within the circle of a family, and see one child forbearing to mix in the sports and gambols of his brothers and sisters; his appetite gone; the traces of tears on his cheek, and his little breast heaving with emotion; and then, winning his confidence, were at last to find that it was because he felt so little love for the mother that had nursed him and fed him, and had watched over him in sickness, and cheered him in health, had shared in his pastimes, and

been his protector and guide ; would not the probability be, that the child had more real and deep affection in his breast than the heedless children who unmoved had passed through all ? Take courage, then, desponding Christian ; your case is a very improving one ; God's eye is upon you ; the everlasting arms are underneath you ; and no one shall pluck thee out of his hands.

Take comfort, in conclusion, also, from the following consideration : the very trials you suffer are all so many proofs of his love, and goodness, and care of you. Go into the forest and see the tangled brushwood, how wild and neglected it grows ; here and there a flower perchance ; but the hand is wounded that would gather it amid the thorns and prickles among which it is hid. There it grows in sad confusion ; the insect preys upon it, with no hand to clear it ; the snake and adder make their lair among its mossy roots ; no one passes by to cull its blossoms, or to

gather its fruits. It grows unheeded ; it lives unseen ; it dies unnoticed, and the axe of the woodman will, ere long, cut it into fagots for the winter's hearth.

And now go with me into that sweet and lovely garden. Behold that willow bending over that glassy lake ; the tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season ; whose leaf doth not wither. Look at that rose of Sharon, whose perfume so enriches the rustling breeze, that the inward man is entranced with delight. Cast your eyes up to the goodly cedar, whose branches, like giant arms, throw their fostering shade over the shrubs beneath, and give home and protection in the sultry heat to the winged creatures, whose every note is melody. See the order that prevails throughout this lovely scene. No weeds to disfigure, no stone to impede, no fastness for the noxious insect ; no straggling branch, no neglected bough ; the flowers in all their beauty ; the fruit in all their richness ; is not the

hand of the gardener apparent in all these works? could these have become so by chance? O no; the rake, and the spade, and the harrow, and the roller, and the pruning-knife, and the greenhouse, and the prop and the stem, and the cord, and the waterpot, and the shady leaf, all have been employed in their season, none out of season; and the master of the property walks in the cool of the evening, and he is refreshed and regaled with the mingled sights of beautiful forms and colours, and rich scents, and order and harmony prevailing.

Have you understood me, beloved brethren? Will you then rather be like the tangled brushwood of the forest, in an unrenewed and unregenerate state, or be born again of the Spirit of God, and be like the flowers and fruits of that lovely Paradise, which makes almost the heart despond that it is not with us now? O yes, we have need of the pruning knife to cut off the dead works of this world; the

spade of God's discipline to open the heart and prepare the soil ; the harrow of reflection to pass over it, and cover it from the birds, even the evil spirits that would gather it to prevent its sinking ; the afflictions to make us think and meditate, which may be compared to the roller ; and the aids, and supports, and encouragements of his grace, which resemble the cord, and the prop, and the stem ; and sometimes exposure to the brightness of the world, that we may be disciplined not to be dazzled with its splendour, which is like the unchecked sunshine on the plant ; and sometimes the quiet retirement, and the shelter, and the evening dew, which are as the shading basket and the greenhouse to the tender plant. O, God's dealings with his children are very gracious, very thoughtful, very kind ; and if we will receive them, then, however much we may have been tried in the infancy, youth, and manhood of life, in the cool evening of age, when the shadows are lengthening,

and the sun's heat is over, we shall feel the presence of God walking with us among the trees of the garden, and with him enjoy that delicious hour which shall know no counterpart but in heaven.

SERMON IV.

ST. JOHN xi. 5.

“ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister.”

How much is contained in these few simple words !—two sisters singled out of the village of Bethany for the peculiar honour and love of the Son of God. What brighter mark could they receive, what nobler description, than to be favoured with such distinction by the Saviour of mankind ? Ambition ! O how much blood hast thou shed ; over how many corsees hast thou driven ; what crimes hast thou committed, to perpetuate on the page of history thy fleeting name ! and the record, with all that was inscribed on it, has faded away, while the means to

obtain such a delusive end are written in an unperishable book by the hand of a Judge that will show no favour, and will punish without mercy. Yes; Cæsar, in all his pomp and glory, was sitting on his throne, surrounded by a brilliant cortège; the governor of countries—of the whole inhabited world; and now he is gone. We know that he was, and now is not; and when we open our Bible, the only memorial that will last for ever, to see his name and read his achievements, we find no mention of him, or his palace, or his conquests, or his armies; but we turn to a little village near Jerusalem, composed of a hundred or two of humble dwellings, and in one of them we find three orphans living, and we read of them that when the Son of God came down from heaven, it was there that he used to visit, and its inmates were the objects of his special regard and notice. “And Jesus loved Martha and her sister, and Lazarus.” As the latter person will one day, if my life be

spared, form the subject of a separate discourse, we will make no allusion to him here of a direct nature.

It was on a very touching and interesting occasion that they are first brought before us. Mary, the younger sister, was the one who afterwards anointed the feet of our Lord with ointment, and wiped them with her hair; and their only brother, Lazarus, was sick. They had such confidence in the Saviour's regard, that they did not hesitate to send for him, and they bespoke his compassion by reminding him that their brother was one whom he loved. Our Lord sent back a message, to say that the sickness was not fatal, but for the glory of God, and that the Son of God might be glorified thereby. This could hardly have conveyed any intelligible meaning; they knew that where God afflicts, it is to humble the sufferer, and lead him as in a dark night to discover starry splendours that his eye had never seen if only opened to the day; and that thus

the glory of God would be manifested in the power of lighting up a lamp where all was gloomy ; and as the Son, their beloved friend and master, was the only appointed channel for communicating such blessedness, he in the same act would be glorified also. But that for them—for their humble house, for their sinful souls—he should work such a miracle, and with one only exception, the raising of the widow's son by Elijah, seldom before performed ; that he should positively shed tears in sympathy with them from one motive, although there were greater ones to cause them, as we shall in the pursual of our subject discover ; it could never have occurred to them that such signal mercies should be exhibited to them, and such a healing hand be outstretched to save. But Martha and Mary had humble and lowly hearts, and where God sees that, he likes to reward it ; for he showeth strength with his arm where all is weak, and while he exalteth them of low degree, he putteth

down the mighty from their seats. Now, here, as elsewhere with the beloved ones of Jesus, grace proportioned to the time of need is given; but with it a previous trial of faith and dependence. At this time Jesus was beyond the Jordan, at a place where John at first had baptized. It would take some time, therefore, for a messenger to travel on foot to convey the intelligence; and as our Lord abode in the same place two days after he was aware of Lazarus' danger, the fourth day would be the one when only he could reach Bethany, and thus a divine purpose was here incidentally accomplished. Lazarus was now laid in the dust. So carping is the spirit of the world, that had our Lord hastened onwards at once to Bethany, and raised him from his bed to life and strength again, a perverse and malicious temper had declared that it had been only a fit, or swoon, and the miracle of resurrection but a pretended work. To render this nugatory, our Lord waited till

the body had been laid in the grave, there to feel the corruption which, if not arrested, would soon have reduced it to powder. On his road he discoursed in beautiful and touching language with his disciples, who one and all declared that in a body they would go down, if necessary, to die with him; and to give them the first deep practical lesson of what a change in that awful state his advent had brought about, he tells them that Lazarus sleepeth. They testified how little they understood his meaning; for they replied, "Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well;" then Jesus plainly told them, "Lazarus is dead; and for your sakes I am glad I was not there, to the intent ye may believe: nevertheless, let us go unto him." It is not my intention to enter into the minutiae of this touching scene; that I reserve for some future day; but I wish so far only to notice it, as it bears upon the history of Martha and Mary. The two sisters had not been left to mourn alone, and what

comfort earthly friends could administer they received from their kind neighbours, who flocked to the mourning house to comfort them concerning their brother. And here we have a beautiful instance of the faithfulness of Martha: as soon as ever she heard that Jesus was coming, she left all her consoling friends, and went out to meet him. O my christian brethren, what need we have, in our trials, and sorrows, and illnessness, and, above all, in the hour of death, to follow her example! How often we gather all our comfort, and even seek it, in the tears and sympathy of our weeping relatives, and little heed the Saviour coming to raise us up, and give life to the soul, and the oil of joy to the heart! There is something in the eager activity, and almost impetuosity of Martha, that to me is peculiarly attractive. She is always the first and foremost: but contrast her with Peter; he was officiously foremost; anxious for precedence; wanting to go on the water; presuming to check

the Saviour in his speech ; the loudest to boast of his attachment, and yet the first to deny. But Martha was of another spirit. When she is first, it is in eagerness to own his power ; in trouble to wait on him ; in zeal to confess him. See how lovely she appears in this history ! She had left all earthly comforters, to seek one, the best and only one ; one whom she loved, one who she knew loved her ; and she meets him with that acknowledgment of his power, that full dependence on his love—" Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died ; and I know that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee." O Martha, how great was thy faith ! What knew she of the resurrection, but that vague and general sense that she shared with the Pharisees ? but never, never did mortal lip utter a higher testimony to the Saviour's power and love than those simple words : and withal, how meek and humble ! She proffers no request ; she

does not ask him to raise her brother ; she tells him she knew he would have saved the friend he loved, had he arrived in time ; and even now, though dead, such was her belief in his power, that even then he could do it ; but she forbore to ask it ; she leaves her case with him—to whom better could she do so ? who loved her and them all so well. Martha, thou didst lose nothing by thy unhesitating confidence in thy Lord ! You will have noticed how generally the Saviour in his instruction takes advantage either of the faith or unbelief of one person to address generally the listening crowd, and here his answer is—willing to show her sincere belief in what was then a disputed doctrine—“Thy brother shall rise again.” But Martha was at no fault : “I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Jesus said unto her, “*I am the resurrection and the life ; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live ; and whosoever liveth and believ-*

eth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" Her answer is the creed of the Christian: "Yea, Lord, I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world." And when she had so said, unwilling that her beloved Mary should lose the privilege of her Saviour's presence, with true sisterly affection she went her way, and modestly, for fear of drawing on them any notice, she told Mary, "The Master is come, and calleth for thee." And now the more retiring, the gentler, the meditative Mary, comes for the first time prominently before us. Our interest suffers no check; the graces that we see in one to love, are, perhaps, surpassed with those we trace in the other. Mary waited for no second summons; she arose quickly, and came unto him. Our Lord had been evidently waiting for Mary. O, my brethren, mark his condescension; for St. John says that he had remained in the same spot where Martha had left him. For the Saviour

to stand and wait for a sinner ! what extreme goodness, what unspeakable bounty, what touching humility ! And so he has waited for thee, O sinner, long and patiently ; but hast thou arisen, like Mary, quickly to go out to meet him ? Never pass over slightly any of the minutiae of any circumstance where our Lord is concerned ; you will find little touches of his goodness breaking out where an indifferent and inattentive and distracted reader will discover nothing. The Jews that had been privy to her suffering in the house, and, as Martha had only secretly announced the coming of the Saviour, were ignorant of her real errand, supposed only that she was going to her brother's grave to weep ; but she threw herself at her Master's feet in an attitude of adoration and supplication, (those feet that she afterwards will anoint and wipe with her hair,) and she used the same phrase as that which Martha had done before her. It shows the unity and sympathy of the two sisters'

characters. They had been led by the same track, been privileged by the same blessings, and had drunk of the same spirit. These words were all she uttered. Martha by lip had testified her faith, Mary by act; her adoration was all that was enough; her heart was too full to speak more. Our Lord, who read it, saw her hidden grief, and his own breast heaved with emotion. He turned round upon the weeping Jews; he looked upon the sorrowing sisters—now both prostrate, probably, before him—and, troubled in mind, he groaned in spirit. He asked where was the body lying; and when he had reached the spot, he wept!—the Saviour wept—God wept! We never read that the Saviour smiled; but thrice we read of his tears. So overwhelming was his grief, that the Jews exclaimed to each other, “Behold how he loved him!” and groaning in himself he came to the grave. And here so unusual, so unprecedented a scene demands more than a rapid glance.

What is it that thus moved the Saviour to weep? he saw in that wasted form and polluted body the effects of sin; he saw how loathsome it was; its deep depravity; its awful consequences; and he wept to think how it had gathered all into the same grave. For as by one man, by one apparently slight cause, sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, in that all had sinned; he saw, since he became the sinner's representative, that even he must stoop and taste all its bitterness. Can you wonder that he wept?

And there was a cause still weightier that wrung tears from his heart—that troubled it, and made it groan. He was standing by a single grave, and he was going to show his power by raising an almost skeleton to youth and vigour, and health and life; but where are the millions that are crumbled into dust? where are those innumerable souls that once had a living body, perhaps sympathizing

friends, weeping sisters, but no Saviour ! where are they now gone ? gone beyond even his power to recall ; now bewailing their impenitence, their obstinacy, their hardness of heart : never to taste of life again ; never to rejoice in the gladdening sun ; but to writhe in agony until the resurrection of the dead, when, by the union of their wasted bodies, new capacities will be given them to suffer agonizing anguish, and the biting tooth of unrelenting despair. Wonder you that he wept ? O no ; he never knew till now what was the extent of sin ; he will know it more when he tastes it in Gethsemane, and on the steep of Calvary ; but here the door seems opening to his mind, and he looks along the vista that is to end in death. But pass we on. There was a stone upon the grave ; it was commanded to be taken away ; and here poor Martha's faith begins to droop, but it soon revives when reminded by her loving Saviour, that if she would but believe, she should see the

glory of God. And Jesus, lifting up his eyes, and blessing his Father that he had heard him, cried with a loud voice, *Lazarus, come forth!* He raised him by his own power, he called him in his own name, and the dead heard and arose, and was given a living man to his dear and sorrowful sisters. I have purposely passed over the details of this, for reasons above stated, but I have related enough to put in a striking point of view how dearly and tenderly "Jesus loved Martha and her sister."

We have two more incidents to notice, in which the character of the younger sister rivets our admiration alone. Hitherto Martha seems to have been most prominent. When we analyze their characters, we shall be more capable of appreciating their several dispositions—both excellent, both winning, both loved by the Saviour, but yet even really different in the leading points. Now Mary comes before us, and absorbs our attention by

the tenderness and affection she lavishes on her Saviour. It would appear that Martha was the owner of the house, and on her, upon two occasions, devolved the charge of household preparation. A supper was prepared for the Saviour, and Lazarus was one of those that sat at table with him, (which implies that there were others also,) while Martha served; then took Mary a pound of ointment of spike-nard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair, and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. And when the traitor Judas, who, from carrying the bag that was destined for the wants of the poor, was in the habit of purloining its contents, grugged this use of a precious odour which would have realized three hundred pence—a sum equivalent to nearly ten pounds of our money—and when he called it a waste of money, the Lord replied, “Let her alone; against the day of my burying hath she done this. For the poor always ye have

with you, but me ye have not always." The Saviour received the attention of Mary with favour : he commended her : he suffered her to do it, and he told his false disciple that there are times when all must give way to the glorifying of the Son of God. I wonder that more use is not made of this, when causes, where pre-eminently the honour of the Redeemer is concerned, are pleaded. We are living in days of economy and rigid parsimony, and when we plead for the house of God that it should be set apart with honour, and decorated as becometh the Most High, O then we hear of nothing but plainness and neatness and simplicity. Hypocrites, selfish hypocrites that we are ! we dwell in houses of cedar, we spare no expense to embellish our dwellings, we take as much pains to bring from every quarter of the globe the rarest and most precious ornaments, as ever Solomon did for the temple of the Most High ; we clothe our floors with carpet, that hardly

from their softness give back the treading of the foot ; we drink out of silver, and the golden plate gleams from the side-board ; we have the songs of minstrels to cheer our evening hour, and we sit on velvet. I speak not of ourselves, but of the rich and noble in our land. And how do we treat God ? We put him off with the cheapest, the most ordinary, the most common materials that we have ; we take no pains to do him honour—anything will do for him. The rich carved mouldings, the polished oak, the beauteous screen, the coloured glass that at evening sun sheds its hallowed light and wakens a deep religious emotion, in the feeling heart, of solemnity and awe ; the strains of music, practised to rehearse his praise ; the finest voices that can be procured ; the men singers and the women singers, that made the harmony breathe of heaven, and which once were heard in our churches—all gone ! in a few of our cathedrals still preserved, but now deserted ! A few strag-

glers that passing through the town would observe the beauties of the architecture, saunter with careless gait and unmeasured pace, and stare about as if the song they heard was to do them honour, and not the Being by whose word they breathe. This is the modern way of honouring God; and if we ask, when a church is building, for funds to ornament it, for carved work, for a grand and tuneful organ, for decorations worthy of our Benefactor, we are replied to in the language of the traitor Judas; for nothing that we have is ours, all being God's, to be used in his service; but because we have the bag, and bear what is put therein, and purloin, like Judas, for our own wants and our own luxuries, and our own depraved tastes and comforts, we cry, Why was all this waste of money? Let it be as plain as possible, and the residue given to the poor. O ye mean, ye money-adoring misers! is it with such niggard hand that God deals out his mercies, his bounties to

you? Look abroad upon the face of nature, see its green pastures, its still lakes, its bounding torrents, its falling cataracts, its silvery cascades. See how he has scattered the fertile soil with flower and fruit, all various, all rich in peculiar beauty. Look up at the gorgeous sun, feel its gladdening beams on your heart, rejoice in its light; walk out and feel the refreshing breeze, and count those stars of glory in the blue twilight which are like the jewels of heaven that one day shall be set in sparkling coronets—for whom?—for you, ye ingrates, who, when God gives you all blessings richly to enjoy with open hand, and asks from you something that will do him honour, you hesitate, you refuse, you give with reluctance, and then with a pitiful offering that, did you bestow it upon your prince, would be thrown into your face with scorn, and you for ever banished from his court for your insolence and baseness. And do you think you will content God with the plea, that

there is no necessity for these marks of honour in the house where God's name is hallowed, and nothing permitted but what is connected with him? Will you delude yourselves with saying that God does not look to outward things, but to the heart; and that the prayer in the hovel will rise as high as from the fretted arch and heaven-piercing tower? It is true; but will that pitiful reasoning content you? If God acted upon the same rigid principle of necessity, he could keep his gladdening sunbeams to himself; he could shut up the sight of the glorious heavens, he could reduce all flowers to one shape and to one colour, and all food to one dish. There is no necessity for all that he has created and given with such unsparing hand; for all purposes of communication, one single, unvarying tone had been enough, and music, with her endless symphony, been unknown, and all the arts and sciences, which daily are revealing new sources of gratitude and wonder,

might have been neglected ; for there is no positive necessity for either. Give a man his loaf of bread and his cruse of water, and his wooden hut and his coat of skin, there is no necessity for his having more. And you yourself, do you act as you treat God ? Where am I to look for your dwelling ? is it of the humble character of the necessary only, or of the elegant and ornamental, and as luxurious as your circumstances will permit ? Do we hear anything of the poor, when the purchase of a new piano, or a new picture, or the furniture of a drawing-room, or the laying out of a garden, or the acquisition of a library, is concerned ? You can do without them—you know you can. What is necessary to secure you daily provision and provide for your family, can all be done within much narrower compass than you have calculated. I cannot do without this or that ; I *must* have this, it only costs fifty or a hundred pounds. How cheap ! perhaps such an opportunity may never

happen again. I admit the reasoning ; but we will change the subject. There is a church building, it only costs the same sum that you were going to devote to yourself : it will never be built again ; you will never feel the sacrifice, and if you did, it would only enhance the value. God says he must have it, for all that he gave you was only that you may give it back to him. And now, what do you say ? Is it wasting it to give it to your God ? Do you put your poor above your Maker and Redeemer ? the poor who, if God's word is true, except in few instances, are all poor through their own vice and extravagance and intemperance, rather than through any dispensation of God's allotment ; and will you dare to consider them above God ? O remember this, ye great and wealthy, and show your hearts are touched, and give as you have been given to, not by ones or twos, but by hundreds and thousands, according to the depth of your treasures. Be like the grateful Mary,

who spent upon the Saviour's feet, the part of least dignity and honour, and poured ointment upon that member which on the first dusty walk would lose all its virtue; and had she possessed anything more valuable, would she have reserved it for herself, or given it to him? O, have but the love of Mary, and you will act like Mary. Know what it is to be described as, Jesus loves him, and nothing is too rich, too precious, too costly to give back to him: it will be your own confession, your own practice.

But there is one more fact to relate connected with the sisters' history, which is not less striking and interesting than those we have already considered. In one of the wanderings of the Saviour he came to Bethany, and Martha received him into her house; and willing to do honour to our Lord, and provide him with the choicest of her fare—(do you do the same?)—she was cumbered about much serving; and as Mary, never willing to neglect any oppor-

tunity that brought her near the Saviour, and perhaps, as the younger sister, not usually occupied in the economy or service of the house, was sitting at the feet of Jesus, and absorbed in all that he was telling her, that poor Martha, anxious to please, comes in an imploring voice to her honoured guest, and asks him if it is no care to him that Mary should leave her to do all the work without helping her at all.

Do not suppose there was anything sinful in Martha's conduct. Jesus loved Martha as well as Mary. It was not for herself that she was much serving : it was no worldly occupation, no jealousy of her sister, that she should have the work, and Mary the time and attention of her Saviour. Characters such as Martha we meet with often in society, ones that we love, that are never idle, always busy and always working for others ; cheerful as the lark, rising early, and late taking rest, economising all things to enlarge their stock for others ; the first to devise

anything for another's comfort and support, self-denying. But there is a time for all things, and when Jesus condescends to teach, Martha should be there to listen. She knew not what she lost; the Saviour's words are too precious to be lightly received. Mary was lying at his feet, alone possessing all his thoughts, all his words, all his looks. O happy, happy Mary ! there was a happy part—a part that never can be taken from thee. We read thy history now ; we see thee in that lowly posture, as once before at the tomb of thy brother, and we try to subdue the envy which rises in our bosom to think that we were not there to share it—to have that beaming look of tenderness and mercy, to hear those lips pouring out peace, and grace, and wisdom, and all for us. O, Martha, thy much serving, though for him, will be no compensation for what thou neglectest. Mary may tell thee all when alone, but she cannot talk like him, she cannot look like him, she cannot convey to thee the

blissful feeling that she had when sitting at his feet. Let us hope that at this gentle rebuke of the Lord, Martha came and sat by Mary, and that the Saviour deigned to repeat his truths, and give to her the same part which never was taken from her.

And now, my beloved hearers, for you was all this written—for you was all this said. God is no respecter of persons, and when he teaches by his Son, he does not shut the door to exclude any; but wherever he is kindly welcomed, there he will come and dwell; and he will treat you just as he treated Martha and Mary, because he loved them; and he loves you too; you cannot doubt it; because persons do not give up their sons for nothing, and see them suffer and die, and lead a more wretched life than any human being ever dragged out on earth. Remember that God *so* loved you—all the emphasis is on that little word *so*—to such a degree he loved you, that he gave his only begot-

ten Son, that whosoever—and *whosoever* is a word that includes every one—believeth on him shall never perish, but have everlasting life. Do not say you do not believe on him ; you deceive yourself, and it is a false fear, and an unworthy delicacy and modesty to say so. I'll give you a proof that you believe on him and love him. Suppose, in the providence of God, you were on a vessel ; she was wrecked, and you were thrown away on an island where your own language was spoken, but where the people had never heard anything of God and the Saviour, and heaven and hell, and the cross of Christ and salvation ; would not you at once tell them all you knew, and teach them and show them how God was to be loved, and how good he had been to them, and what he had done for them ; and when they did anything that displeased him, would you not tell them, and show them how to obey him ? Well, then, could you do all this, and would you do all, if you

did not believe in God and love him too ? Never say again, then, such foolish things, for God does not like to hear them,—and you would not do what God does not wish, would you ? Because, you see, it is doubting his word : it is making him out to be a God not half so kind and merciful and good as he is, and that is not being as a grateful child should be. Well, then, God loves you, and when you have a trial and trouble, go to him as Martha and Mary did. Earthly friends are very pleasant, especially in sorrow, but they are not like the Saviour. You must leave them as the sisters did, and go to Jesus ; and you must do it, as they did, immediately, and fall down at his feet, and tell him that, had he been with you always, nothing ever could happen to you ; and he will then relieve you, and at the tomb he will give you such confidence in the resurrection, that you will have no uneasiness to descend into it. And then be sure also to honour him with the best of your

substance. Make much of your dear Saviour ; give him the best of everything you have, as Martha and Mary did ; honour him in much serving ; you will not be cumbered in working for him ; and those occasions when more than any other you feel that the Saviour is willing to teach, take advantage of them. Duties are higher and lower, and the lower ones must give way to the higher ones always, and they will not be neglected ; for the nearer we grow to the Saviour, the more our faculties will be sharpened, the larger will become our means to be more active in his service ; the higher grows the tree, the fuller will its branches be of fruit and flowers, and the more sap rises from the root, the more capable it will become of bearing. Bear then blossom and fruit, the one to honour, the other to feed : it is a good part, it is the one needful part, it is one that is imperishable, that the world cannot give or take away. It is God's gift ; and God, if once given, will never,

never take it from you. Try, therefore, to blend the two characters in one. Be in all earthly duties, like Martha, active, prompt, ready, industrious, unselfish, devoted; and in all heavenly duties like the faithful, tender, and affectionate Mary; like her, sit at his feet when he teaches; like her, rise up quickly, and go to meet him when he is on the way; he will wait for you as he waited for her. Like her, take the costliest gift you have, and devote it to him; like her, choose the better part, the one thing needful, and it shall never be taken from thee.

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SERMON V.

1 COR. X. 31.

“Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”

It is one of those singular delusions by which mankind in general is led away captive, and which, but for parallel sophistries, one could hardly reconcile with plain reason and common sense, to substitute a part for a whole ; and when the law of God, for instance, requires an indefinite surrender, and that affecting no particular time, but pervading every minute, to fancy the law is fulfilled to all necessary purposes when the service is partial and momentary. Thus men have come to put their souls off with a Sunday religion, a few conspicuous acts of obedience, certain splendid self-denials, and

acts of charity, occasional abstinence from glaring sins, stated acts of devotion, frequent assemblings at church and repairings to the altar—and they think that is religion. The meaning of the word itself, if aught else were wanting, would put to flight such a monstrous thought. Religion is a Latin word, composed of a verb which means the binding again, from two Latin words which are thus literally translated, as if the soul had broken away from God, and was immediately made captive to Satan, the Saviour comes and breaks his chains, and gives a liberty; but as there is no such thing as genuine liberty where there is a supreme Being, only a change of service, the act which transfers the sinner from one master to another, and binds him again to the God from whom he has wandered, is called most appropriately and justly—religion. Now judge ye whether that word can in any wise apply to the vagaries which sometimes hold a man to God for a few minutes, and then

let him loose again to the world for hours and days. The etymology sets at defiance such an interpretation, and we must look wider and deeper, and farther and higher, would we attain to that mysterious word which signifies a close and never-breaking union between God and the sinner. And in these things I always like to avoid high-flown metaphors, and take the simplest which occur to me. It is not to cull the flowers of rhetoric, and deck you in the fleeting garland of half an hour, to please and interest you, that we are met together, but to bring God nearer to you, and the soul nearer to God; to sweep away the mists and clouds, and show truths in their plain and simple dress; to call things by their right names, which Satan never does; and to weigh things by a just balance, which the false and cheating spirit never does; and to hold up a true mirror, where you may see the faintest lineaments, and not to flatter you. I would measure you by the only

standard that can be of service to you, by which your true character can be known.

Now I remember when, accompanied by a party of friends, I was privileged to visit the dockyards of Portsmouth, among mighty works and ingenious machinery, which made an indelible impression on my mind, there was one simple contrivance to prevent detection which more than all the rest delighted me ; and I do not think I could find anything which would more perfectly illustrate the subject before us than what an intelligent officer there showed us. Among so vast a crowd of men of all ranks and professions and circumstances, the government is exposed to a great deal of imposition, and therefore they weave into every rope that issues from their stores a small red line which passes through the very centre. This stamps it to be of good solid workmanship, a rope that may be trusted in a storm ; and the rope must be entirely unwoven to remove it ; and to steal a piece of such royal rope

is considered, I believe, as a capital crime, as purloining the property of the sovereign. Could anything more touchingly illustrate God's method with sinners? Unless the blood of Christ run like *a red line* through the *entire* life of a man, broken in no spot, no, not for an inch, the royal mark is not upon him, he is not of sovereign workmanship; he is rejected as not good enough to be admitted to the stately building that shall sustain the glory of the King, and defend his name and title and dominions. But if it is found within him, no one can tear it away without wrenching him from Christ, and the *red mark*, the *saving blood of Christ*, shall be distinguished even in the severing of soul and body. The day has been—or rather, let me say, there are still such characters who have such simple and earnest avidity for truth, that when once it is presented, the aptitude to receive it is so decided, that it is at once adopted into the system, and made one with the man; and, like one of

Euclid's theorems, the truth once admitted and proved, he requires no other proof; he never goes back to it; it is an axiom, a creed, his very life. But alas! though sometimes, as here, truth will manifest her great strength, and put to flight each particle of darkness with a very look, yet but too often man has so familiarized himself to duplicity and sin, that none but God's positive, and, as it were, sovereign and creative act, can effect the change of feeling. The prophet's complaint is not yet hushed; there must be line upon line, precept upon precept; here a little, and there a little; and I am sure, had he lived in these sceptic days, he would have added a great deal upon a great deal; and these, after all, one in a hundred receives, and the ninety-nine reject.

Let us, therefore, consider what is God's view of religion, the religion which will stand us in some stead when nothing else will; which will be our health when we are sick, our riches when we are poor,

our reputation under slander, our friend when deserted, our refuge when the storm presses, our sunshine in sorrow, our aid in death, our release in judgment. God's religion will do all this, but I never heard of a human one that would. It will carry a man to the font and to the altar, and it may make him endow a hospital, and portion the orphan and the widow; it may cast the ray of benevolence over his smile, and render him a blessing to all around him; and, after all, it may be of the earth earthly—earthly in its origin, earthly in its effects. When we read in ancient history of the clemency of Titus, the firmness of Brutus, the justice of Aristides, the integrity of Socrates, the wisdom of Solon, the world-hating Diogenes, the devotedness and virtue and natural piety of Camillus, the Scipios, the Gracchi, Fabius, Seneca, and Cicero, and Plato—no one of our day need vaunt of perfection in morality, and must hesitate before he decides whether the actions which have

gained him his name had any origin more heavenly than the heathen have cited. But far rather would I sketch for you the religion of the Gospel, the religion that saves, that changes, that renews, that ennobles, that sanctifies, that glorifies. Have I said too much in thus describing it? Are not the iniquities of the sinner laid upon Christ, and we saved by his stripes? Is he not cleansed from the sin that defiled him, because all was imputed to his Redeemer, who became his representative, while his righteousness is imputed to the believer, who enjoys all the benefits and blessedness of the exchange? Does it not change his whole character? instead of fear, he has confidence and courage; instead of despondency, elation of heart; instead of a foe to appease, a friend to love; instead of a hell to avoid, a heaven to inherit; instead of a stony heart to lament, one of flesh to rejoice in. O what change can equal these! All that Adam lost is renewed in Christ: his purity, his

holiness, his childlike simplicity, his trusting faith, his single-eyed wisdom, his oneness with God ; and what nobility can show its patent and title, that can compare with the Christian ; he draws his deed from heaven itself : it has the sign manual of the fountain of royalty ; its bonds stretch over worlds, its sway higher than angels. Christ is the elder brother, but he is joint heir with him in the glories of heaven, his nearest kinsman, and God himself is his protecting Father. How all earthly glory dwindles into insignificance ! Where would we seek it after a few years ? where the purple pall is spread over the rich decorated coffin, and the sculptured stone is opened to receive the mouldering ashes. Gone, for ever gone ! the worm makes no difference between king and peasant, and corruption feeds on silk and velvet, as well as on rags and sackcloth. But there is a robe that the worm cannot touch, garments that wax not old ; treasures that corrupt not by moth or rust ;

laid up where no thief can break through to steal them ; and the key of them all is put into the hand of the humblest believer, to whom God is every thing, who, whether he eats or drinks, or whatever he does, does all to the glory of God.

If God treated you as you treat him—I will go much lower in reasoning, and I will force you step by step to say there never breathed such an ingrate on this earth as your ownselfes ; and I will do it by a simple tale, the point of which the weakest intelligence can comprehend.

There was a certain person endowed with such rare qualities and powers, that he was the glory of the land where he resided. His very enemies had never been able to discover any flaw in him ; and the confession was unanimous, that when any difference arose between him and any of his neighbours, the fault and injury were invariably found to be on their side, and never on his. His power was unlimited, and his justice inflexible ; and

yet, if any virtue might be said to abound where all were infinite, it was goodness—his mercy, his love—indeed there was no name he so much liked to be called by as LOVE. I would in this slight sketch convey to you that in him all perfections were centred: he was the richest being ever known, and all the good delighted in him. He dwelt in a magnificent palace, where everything that could delight was to be found; and his company was sought after by those who had any suffering, any need, any care, or who wished to acquire purity, holiness, peace; and he never sent any one empty away. All that he required was the wish to be blessed, and he never kept them waiting or standing at the door, or put them off with an excuse, or attended to others before them, but blessed them at once. Now one would think that in such a household there would not be a breast where peace and love and joy and hope and holiness were not enthroned; that the Father would be sin-

gled out for all honour and respect; and that, if he were not made the exclusive subject of attention and notice, the conversation and intercourse would immediately flag and weary, and know no cessation until returned to its original channel, because none other could be more intelligent, interesting, important, absorbing, than what flowed from his lips; and as it was considered by those who knew its value from experience to be above all price and estimation, they who most drunk of his spirit would be the readiest and the most eager to drink more: for it is ever thus, as beautifully remarked by a close observer of nature, that they who most live in one element are the most attached to it; for when the summer shower descends in rapid streams, who is it that widest opens its white and delicate bosom to greet it? Not the parched grass that needs it most, but the fair water lily, whose roots are planted in the bed of the river, and whose wide leaves

are floating on its surface ; and it is ever thus : the heavenly strain will never weary to the heart in tune ; the heavenly feast will never satiate the heaven-made appetite, the waters of life never cease to refresh the panting tongue that once has moistened itself at its source. But, alas ! among this favoured family, who had received the same privileges, been honoured with the same name, enriched with the same inheritance, invited to the same intercourse, as near, had they chosen it, to the parent's heart as any of the rest, by some fatality or other never were so happy in his presence as elsewhere. There was a chill that seemed to freeze their very hearts, when his name, still more when his praise, was the theme of discourse. They could hear it for a little time, just a little conversation in the morning, a salutation and acknowledgment of relationship, and the same at parting for the night ; but there was nothing cordial, nothing that showed they took any interest

in it. They had even the ill breeding and insolence, on these little meetings, to fall asleep sometimes in the very act of speaking, and complained, by way of excuse, that it was because they were so very tired; when, if any one had kept but a diary of what they had done or said or thought that was the pretext for such fatigue, he would have been heartily ashamed of them. This was their general conduct; but to enter into particulars more minute will really convict them of such base ingratitude as hardly can be listened to without indignation. You enter the room, and in a neglected corner, while the best seats are occupied by the children, you see that venerable man sitting—never addressed except when necessity compels—his opinion neither asked nor listened to when given—no welcome, no sympathy. You have but to mention his name, when the whole current of conversation is suspended, and you feel you have touched a string which does not harmonize, but jar.

There is no respect paid to him if any joke is passed which throws any slight or slur upon his name or character ; not only no disposition to vindicate his honour, but a share in the laugh. Is it mentioned that such and such a thing is particularly displeasing to him ? it is treated as so many idle words ; the dust covers the book which he had given them as the rules to regulate their life. If any one thing is conspicuous over another, it is this, that his presence wearies them, teazes them, prevents them from doing what they would, makes life a burden to them ; they are longing to taste the pleasures of the world, but he has forbidden them. They sigh for its pomps and vanities, but he has prevented them from partaking of them. And so day passes after day. They never do him a single kindness from the heart ; they have not one spark of gratitude for what he has done, and all the while is doing for them. Had he been an automaton, they could not pay less defe-

rence to him. It is clearly evident there is no sympathy in the world between one and the other. But, in order to make the contrast stronger, we will suppose the introduction of a stranger, one of their chosen friends, a special favourite—one whom they profess to consider the model of a companion and friend—with whom time never wearies—who has always got something kind or flattering or brilliant or clever to say ; and then the reason they assign for this partial love is, because he is so good, so excellent, so little selfish, so benevolent, so active in the making of others happy, so thoughtless of himself. The meeting is most cordial, everything is put aside—the harp, the book, the work, the paper ; and nothing will claim the slightest notice but the all-absorbing friend. But in all this time not one word has been said of the master of the house, not one salute, not one word to him. A statue could have had as much respect paid to it as the owner ; he is no

more consulted than the servant, his name trippingly mentioned in an oath, or appealed to as a witness to some act of folly, or some licentious lampoon ; and the laugh and the smile go round in the family, which are cited, above all others, for union and paragons of domestic virtue, while the father is treated with contempt and insolence.

Now you will observe, if for earthly reasons they merit this character ; if they are so united, so benevolent ; if so glad to distribute, and so ready to defend, the iniquity of their crime is heightened and deepened to a formidable extent, because their hardened conduct proceeds from a wilful determinate rebellion ; their very capacity for loving others proves their capacity for loving the Father ; and if they could allege anything against him ; if one single complaint could be urged ; if he had ever injured them, stinted them, denied them anything they wanted, the case would change. But all the delight

they find in that most miserable being with whom they laugh and chat, was as nothing to what they would have found in their father. He was a wretched worm that the father had but to frown upon, and it would be withered away; and all their charms would fade at his look, and their riches turn to corruption, and their gifts to losses, and their friends to foes, and their joys to sorrows, and their life to death, and their grave to hell; and there, O there! there is a worm to feed on them that hath no need to bite—a flame to consume them that has need of no fire to light it. There is something within, which they cannot shake off, which they must carry with them for ever—the tooth of a thankless heart; and every time they think of their injured father, (and now his memory will never leave them,) and every time his image rises before them, (and it is engraven on their very soul,) and every kind and loving word of his they recall, (and memory has been te-

nacious of those precious tones, and faithfully records every one ;) and every time that they remember their folly, their sin, their deep, their base ingratitude, and his goodness, his kindness, his unprovokable long-suffering, his quickness to forgive, his slowness to condemn, his unbounded bounty, his generous heart—O ! annihilation would be paradise ; but life in eternity cannot be quenched : it has its hell as well as its heaven, its devils as well as its angels ; it has its withering curses as well as its blooming and ever-heightening blessings ; and if anything could pierce and cut and rend that black and breaking, but never-broken heart, it must be the sight of those whom they sneered and laughed at, and chided and even hated, because they were so fond of telling of their father's love and singing his praises, and asking him in childlike confidence for all their little wants, granted as soon as expressed ; and when, from momentary thoughtless-

ness, the frown furrowed the brow of the indulgent parent, and the smile vanished for a season, his arms would clasp them and press the kiss of reconciliation to their lips ; all this, which once they derided and voted as gloomy and melancholy and vapourish, what would they not give for that hour themselves ! But, alas ! they look up into their father's face, and the frown, marble, cold, and unchanging, the frown of anger, indignation, condemnation is settled there, the smile for ever gone, the father's house barred against them, themselves stripped of everything they had, their friends gone for ever, the world burnt up, their flesh and heart failing, and the grave open, and no retreat, and something dogging and tracking them behind—the now feeling conscience, the broken but now venerated law ; the word of God that would have saved, but now condemning ; the cross—but there is no blood, and it will not save, but is the stake to crush ; the crown, not of jewels,

but piercing thorns ; the robe, not the white one of purity, but the black one of desolation, that eats and corrodes the flesh ; the book in the angel's hand, but their name is not entered ; and the roll, where the seven vials of the wrath of God are poured out, and where is written, in characters of blood — darkness, lamentation and woe — and there, there is the fatal name inscribed. O, it is too heart-rending to continue ! Is this one of the family of God ? Has it ever enjoyed its presence ? Surely it never saw him, never knew him ; it must be ignorance of his character ; it had not surely a Sunday to draw near to him ; it had never been taught to fold the hand and bend the knee in prayer ; it must have been neglected, overlooked. God's grace could have done nothing for it, it must have been made an exception to his usual mercy, and doomed to death. O no, no no, the contrary of all this. Tell me what could have been done, and I will pledge thee it has been done ; but

it was resisted, it was put back, it was refused, it was despised ; it is a death, but it is suicidal ; it was beyond mercy, the Lamb himself could not look over it.

My brethren, there are some of you, who cannot fail, in the first part of this description, to recognize yourselves. You have treated God far worse than these wicked children have treated their parent. You have had no provocation, no cause ; but you have done it, and you are doing it ; and if you continue, be assured you cannot escape the consequences. God looks into your heart, and every act and thought and word that is not for his glory is sin—sin that will sink you into ruin. You may be tripping on with a light unthinking footstep, but it is over graves that you are all treading, and they but conceal the preying flames beneath. O, in mercy to your own souls, resist not these overtures while you may learn the religion of Christ, the religion that I described in the beginning of this discourse, the only

one that can save, change, renew, sanctify, ennoble, glorify. It may be yours as freely as St. John's, the beloved of the Saviour. There is no spite in God's dealings, no predeterminate malice. He wishes not your death, but your salvation. Your soul is precious to him. O! were it as precious to yourself, how pure, how holy, how loving you would be! Give that heart to Him, who besides yourself is the only one that knows its value. He will wash it and cleanse it, and make it like his own, give a death-blow to all sin, and life-birth to all pure and holy thoughts. Seek him by prayer, in his word, in his temple; avoid all those that love and serve him not. Speak well of his name at all times and at all seasons; *show the red line* throughout the whole thread of life. Glorify him in your studies, in your amusements, in your conversation, in your meals, in your solitude, in your prayer, among your friends, in your family, before your servants, in the

world. Glorify him in health, in sickness, in the fires of suffering, in the hallelujahs of victory. O, could I write that verse upon every fibre of my body, upon every feeling of my heart, that it might be my life in death, and my breath expire in uttering —“ Whether I eat or drink, or whatever I do, O God, my Saviour, I will glorify Thee !”

SERMON VI.

THE SILENCE IN BUILDING THE TEMPLE
OF THE LORD.

1 KINGS vi. 7.

“ And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither : so that there was neither hammer nor axe, nor any tool of iron heard in the house while it was in building.”

THOSE parts of the Jewish history which most interest and absorb the attention, are the reigns of David and Solomon. In the earlier ages, though overwhelmed with astonishment and admiration at the many miracles wrought in their behalf, at the unwearied mercy of their heavenly Guide, and his long-suffering and slowness to anger ; and though there are

many touching scenes, such as the manna, and the stricken rock, and the stream which followed them, and the never-wearing garment and shoe, and the luminous cloud, and many others grand and imposing, as in the sound of thunder and the flash of lightning on the height of Sinai, when the law was enacted; yet still throughout there are so many things that pain and irritate us: their continual wanderings and murmurings, their discontent, idolatry, ingratitude, peevishness, unnatural conduct—all these traits under so many different forms, and repeated so often in each, diminish very much the interest which, as natural men, we take in the record of their history. And then, when their time of conquest begins, the days of their judges, the siege of Jericho, the passage of the Jordan, their undaunted valour, and what is more than all, their exemplary faithfulness; (for you will remember that, as it is in spiritual things, a wilderness education

had produced a generation of children which are said to have been the most upright and constant in adhering to the Lord ;) but still all this noble stand, as a nation, was of small duration : when the judges were appointed, and during their long series of three hundred and twenty years, take away the Samuels and Samsons and Gideons and Deborahs, and what have we left ? Were there ever such bickerings and quarrellings among themselves, and such open idolatry and ingratitude against God ? One would think that the promised land, that land of milk and honey, was still unpossessed, and that they had been defrauded of all their hopes and cheated of their covenant, to hear them talk and see them act ; and yet God had never failed them, never disappointed, never deceived them. Their own lips had again and again, and more especially on that solemn day when their journeyings were over, and they were about to cross the river which put an end to their wan-

derings, confessed that God had fulfilled all his promises, and in no whit had betrayed them. But would we see the favoured people in their brightest colours, we must advance in their course, nor stop till we arrive at the period when the republic was broken up, and the aristocracy of the Judges dissolved, and the strength and power and wisdom and beauty all gathered into royalty. And here I would observe in passing, not liking to pass over a truth which it would be more for the happiness of our beloved country if never forgotten, that though God was angry with the Israelites in wishing for a king to rule them, as it is expressed in his sacred word, "they added yet to their wickedness in wishing to have a king," yet their crime was not in the act of wishing for a king, as we shall clearly see, but in rejecting God; for, up to this time, he, under all the forms of government, had assumed that office; Moses and Joshua and the Judges only legislated by his directions

and authority; and to make the proof more convincing, from the moment that the regal office was instituted, God immediately sets it apart, more than any other title, to represent himself. Thus we have in the Psalms: "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." In the prayer of our Lord, the kingdom is ascribed to God; and of Christ it is emphatically said, that "of his kingdom there shall be no end;" while he is called in the Apocalypse the "King of kings and Lord of lords;" and there is no expression in the mouth of our Saviour and his apostles more constantly used to represent the glad tidings of the Gospel than the kingdom of God. Thus you see, in this day of contemptible pretension, when judged by the standard of the Bible, intellect indeed has taken a march, but it has been the march from manhood to childhood, the radicals and chartists and revolutionists, who talk so loudly and proudly about levelling and equality and equal rights and the law of

nature, have a quarrel to settle with God before they can presume to attack the law and constitution of their land. Here is not the place or time to expose their pitiful reasoning, but nothing is more deserving of the attention of the christian minister who loves his country, than to point out, wherever he has the opportunity, the fallacy of prevailing public opinions. I cannot help reading to you a passage from the Proverbs of Solomon—a man who had at least as much wisdom as these brawlers who are poisoning the land less by the follies they prate of than by the scandal of their conduct. You will find it in the 24th chapter, verses 21, 22: “My son, fear thou the Lord and the King, and meddle not with them that are given to change: for their calamity shall rise suddenly, and who knoweth the ruin of them both?” Would you not think that Solomon had these people in his eye when he gave that warning and counsel? How earnestly is it to

be wished that on all subjects, whether in the governing of a nation or a household, the ruler would consult his Bible for the principles ; he would never err, if he sought the aid of the Spirit, for all is truth and certainty with God, and we should have no necessity for councils and cabinets, for God would take the reins and lead us where we should go. But to return. The glorious time for Israel was under her kings, David, and Solomon, and Asa, and Hezekiah, and Josiah ; but the most striking was Solomon, and the event of all others the most conspicuous there, which stands out with such pre-eminence that it is the date which the school-boy treasures up by which to regulate his chronology, is the building and consecration of that glorious temple, the joy of the whole earth.

The ark which had represented the presence of God was for centuries doomed to dwell in the humble tabernacle, oftentimes taken captive, betrayed, abandoned,

though its removal from the house of Obed-edom, as mentioned in the 6th of 2 Kings, was attended with much rejoicing, and was the occasion of that magnificent psalm, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and let the King of glory in. Who is the King of glory? the Lord of hosts; He is the King of glory." Yet what was this as a homage to the God of heaven? Many ceremonies and processions in our times outvied it in imposing pomp and lustre. And David, as he heard the clang of cymbals, and the blast of trumpets, and the songs of minstrels, and the hallelujahs of the multitude, though he was so carried away by his feelings, that in the ecstasy of his heart he danced with rapture before the Lord, must have conceived the thought that though the ark was now brought home to his own palace, and treated there with all the honour and consideration and veneration he could command, yet that it was unworthy its high

surpassing glory, and that it should be the employment of his remaining days, if not to build a temple suitable in grandeur and magnificence, since God had refused it as he had been a man of war, at least to make the amplest preparations, and facilitate the labours of his son. So that he was continually adding to his stores and treasures, and everything was sacrificed to enrich the future house of God.

Bent down with age and honour, for the hoary head is a crown of glory if found in the way of righteousness, far more dazzling and splendid than that which had encircled his brows in life, he relinquished his fleeting throne to take a higher and a nobler, to wear a crown which never tarnishes—jewels which never spot. And Solomon, the wonder of the whole world, the oracle for wisdom, the treasure-house of wealth, who in all these three points has descended to posterity as a proverb for all, ascended the

throne, and his heart was right with God, and it is said the Lord loved Solomon. His reign was conspicuously one of peace ; from the first to the last minute the air was less rent with the war-cry, the clash of armour, or the din of arms, than in any reign, and till the temple was built, all had been peace, quietness and rest ; and all the energies of his mighty mind, and all the treasures of his palace, and the most skilful artificers of the world, whether native or foreign, all enlisted to begin this work of praise. The earth was ransacked to supply its choicest possessions ; no labour, no expense was spared to make it all that was most glorious and gorgeous ; and so magnificent was it, that though after its destruction before the captivity, when rebuilt, it was shorn of nearly all its splendour, and poor and mean in comparison with the first, yet it is said, that when Titus the Roman emperor had cut his trenches round that devoted city, and the sun reflected back, with scarce diminished bright-

ness, his pure and unsullied rays from its golden dome and roofs and arches, he paused ere he had the heart to give the signal to destroy, so blinded was even a Roman emperor with the dazzling glory of this the mere apology of Solomon's temple.

It is needless to enter into details of its construction under the son of David. You may give wings to your imagination, and rob judgment of its sobriety, and indulge your full fancy, and like the expectant Sheba, who had travelled half the world over to see the riches of his treasure-house, which, during the seven years it was erecting, must probably have been replenished and exhausted several times, and so much was she overcome with their vastness, that the sacred penman declares there was no spirit in her, and she said to the King, "It was a true report that I heard in my own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom; howbeit I believed not the words until I came, and my eyes had seen it; and behold, the half

was not told me; thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard. Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom. Blessed be the Lord thy God, which delighted in thee to set thee on the throne of Israel: because the Lord loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king, to do judgment and justice."

But there was one peculiarity about this building that it shares with no other; in splendour, and magnificence, and luxury, some might come near, and even surpass it, as the golden house of Nero at Rome; but in this all *the stones were made ready before they were brought thither, so that neither the hammer, nor axe, nor any tool of iron, was heard therein while it was in building.*

And it was for this remark, for which all previous ones were preparatory, that I selected the passage before us. You are aware that in God's dealings with the

people of Israel, and also in all those cases where he deals with types and tropes, there are three applications, and it is not until we have seen their suitableness to all three, that we shall have attained to the full and complete understanding of the text. First, the letter, which we have been considering ; second, its reference to the individual Christian, which we now proceed to ; and thirdly, to the church universal of Christ, which will conclude our meditation.

II. With regard to the individual Christian, there is great propriety in the application of the text to the work of God's Spirit on the soul. So great, so noiseless is the way in which he gains possession of the sinner's heart, that the sound of any instrument of violence is never heard. How unlike this to man's actions ! When he would persuade, his voice assumes the force of a strong and great wind that rends the mountains and breaks in pieces the rocks before the Lord. But the Lord's

voice is not in the wind, or by his mighty eloquence he would cleave and divide the heart to make an entry like an earthquake; but the Lord is not in the earthquake, or he would take up all the severities of the law, and preach its curses with a view to melt the hard heart of the impenitent, like fire; but the Lord is not in the fire; but in the still small voice, unheard by every ear but his to whom it is addressed, and these are the words that it just catches: "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands; forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." O you know not the costly value of these still and precious words, unless you have known the contrast of the loud and domineering way in which Satan addresses his followers. But who is there that is ignorant of that? the doubt lies not here. But have you heard the gentler accents of a sin-forgiving God? When torn and bat-

tered with the treacherous world, disappointed where most you had hoped, poorest where you had counted upon wealth, deserted where you had depended upon support and fidelity, betrayed where you had invested every feeling of your heart, and then, instead of sympathy and compassion, which the destitute can ever give, to find reproach, and calumny, and mockery ; and then, when day's garish beams have faded away, and night drives you to your couch to hide you from your own eyes, so lost and fallen have these persecutions made you ; when you retire to the inner room, and commune with your own heart in your chamber, and are still ; is it not then that the all-prevailing power of the Spirit makes itself to be felt, and the balm that he pours into the bruised heart is sweet and healing, and you feel that God's remedies are dearer and softer than man's injuries ? It is the lesson that the Christian first learns, that he is learning all his life, that he will never know com-

pletely by heart till he has felt; that it is sweet to lie passive in his hands, and know no will but his. "Be still, and know that I am God." O yes, we are too restless, too feverish, too excited; we want to act when we ought to hear—we want to lead when it is ours to follow. Why should we dictate to one who knows not only our constitution, our nature, all the little fibres of our heart, but has the management of all hearts, too, in his hands; and all circumstances which can possibly affect us; and Satan himself too,—for he is not free to act as he will—he is chained and fettered and locked, and God has the end of his chain fast and firm in his hand, and he will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able to bear. He has never allowed his grace to be smaller than the need, or the snare stronger than the way to escape. He never leaves thee to thy own prudence for a single minute; he that watcheth over Israel is not one to slumber or sleep. Why art thou ever then cast down? What

cause have you to be disquieted within you, so long as there is hope in God? O believe me, however dark may be the cloud, the sunshine will return; I pledge you, by the promise of your heavenly Father, who loves his timid and fainting child, that ere long you shall yet praise him who is the health of your countenance and your God. In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength; do not be impatient; do not wrestle with God; he is stronger than you. He will have his own way, and by his own means, and you may struggle as you will, you cannot master him. He may see fit to bring you into straits and difficulties, but it is only that in them you may find better weapons and a safer breast-plate: he may bring you down to the darkness of the grave, but there is one brighter than the morning star that will raise you up again; he may strip you of everything you possess, but it is only to lay them by at interest, and to make over to you the key that opens treasures above,

that can never rust, or fade, or be stolen. He wants only this one lesson deeply learnt—to depend on him; to be quiet in his keeping. See how often that is made the character of future blessedness. Job xxxiv. 29, “When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?” Psalm xxiii. 2, “He leadeth me beside the still waters.” Isaiah xxxii. 18, “My people shall dwell in a peaceful habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting-places;” and in the chapter following, at the 20th verse, “Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities; thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down; not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be removed, neither shall any of the cords thereof be ever broken.” How unlike the habitation of the world, that must be battered down and decay; how unlike the reed which pierces the hand that leans on it; how unlike the troubled world where peace and rest, and quietness and

security and confidence, can never be found ! O no ; the Lord has no need of the hammer or the axe to change the heart ; the gentlest means he finds the surest ; and where there is least noise, there is ever most grace. It is the full quiet stream that glides by without a wave, which bears up the heavy laden vessel ; the brawling rivulet that makes its murmuring music among the rugged stones, may delight the ear, but it little profits.

But if there is any part of the Christian's character to which our text is pertinent, it is the quiet and unpretending way in which the grace of God speaks to the soul. We ever find that where the profession is the loudest, there religion, the religion of the heart, suffers ; there is nothing riotous, nothing boasting, in the humbling religion of Jesus ; its convert seeks the lowest place, affects the lowest language ; its prayers are preferred not in the market-place, but in the silent chamber, when the door is shut. It makes no

noise like the hammer, but sin is filed away softly until the evil is removed and the shape attained. Doubt ever the reality of that faith which is most prompt to assert its vitality. He that humbleth himself shall be exalted; he that takes the lowest seat at the feast shall be raised up higher; he that is in reality the greatest, will be glad to be the minister or servant of the rest. See how gently and noiselessly the evening star lights up her vesper lamp; how gently the sun drives his chariot across the sky; how soft and balmy are the early footsteps of the dawn as she tracks her steps with roses, and chases the darkness of the night. And when the patriarch Joseph would reveal himself, there stood no man with him when he made himself known to his brethren; and Christ, the elder brother, puts all away, allows no witness, is alone with the sinner when he opens his arms to receive him, and falls upon his neck and kisses him, and tells him he is inno-

cent of his blood through the pardon that he gives him. Well may we quote those expressive verses of the poet :

Even human love will shrink from sight
Here in the coarse rude earth ;
How then should rash intruding glance
Break in upon *her* sacred trance,
Who boasts a heavenly birth ?

So still—so secret is the growth—
Ever the truest heart,
Where deepest strikes her kindly root,
For hope or joy—for flower, for fruit,
Least knows its happy part.

God only and good angels look
Behind the blissful screen,
As when, triumphant o'er his woes,
The Son of God by moonlight rose,
By all but Heaven unseen.

I would, therefore, warn you not to be misled by that state of soul where the emotions may happen to be strongest and fullest. They are no criterion of the health of the soul ; they may pamper it,

but they do not feed and nourish it. It is a diseased stomach that craves after dainties—the healthy body thrives on the pure water and the simple bread. The soul is most flourishing, not when it is in ecstasies and enthusiastic; but when sin is most mortified—when the old man decreases daily, and Christ increases daily. O strive after that winning gentleness of spirit which most resembles the dove, which not without reason the sacred writers have chosen to prefigure the Holy Spirit.

III. But I am impatient to proceed to the third division, the most noble, the most comprehensive of the whole; and here I feel the vastness of the subject and my own insignificance in painful contrast. If I cannot hew a single stone to stand in the temple of the living God, how can I speak of that temple itself which has known no similitude—of which Solomon's was but the feeble type? Let us keep to Scripture, for then we cannot err. The

chief corner-stone is the Lord Jesus Christ ; the builders rejected it ; but it is now the head-stone of the corner. The temple has been building since the beginning of the world ; as long as a single believer is on the earth, it is incomplete : it would be disfigured without him, for it will be all joined and fitly compacted together, and with one stone wanting it could not be perfect. But what makes this temple most like to Solomon's is, that the stones are all brought ready prepared. In the building, or putting them together, there is no noise of hammer or axe, or any tool of iron heard in the house while it is building ; but as the stones are all prepared beforehand, we will consider that act and the time and place in which it is performed.

And here there can be little difficulty in declaring that the quarry-time for these temple stones is the lifetime of* each believer. God finds him cold and dead and shapeless, and he takes him out of the

earth, and gives him into the hands of the great builder, the Spirit, to make him a living stone—one that shall stand in a great building he designs to erect. And here the work is beyond the skill of any human mason, for it is so hard that the edge of any earthly axe is turned; but God has weapons, even his word, that is sharper than any two-edged sword, and that can cut and turn it into any shape it will. You will perceive it is with hearts as with marble, that they differ in quality of hardness and softness, some requiring even fire to rend them; and God is often obliged to throw some into the fires of affliction, which resist the gentler touches of the hammer and axe. Now you will also remember that the workman does not strike at a venture, or without any settled plan before him: he has a plan of the building, an architectural draught by which he knows the exact spot and precise shape assigned to each stone; and whether it takes him weeks or months, or

even years, to effect it, he knows that it must be done at last, or the great Architect will neglect the stone when the materials are all provided for the building, and the head-stone is raised with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it. So he is intent upon his work, and if one blow does not suffice, he gives another, and another, and another, until it is made like to the model before him. But nothing dispirits; be the stone hard or soft, the only difference is what he makes with the instrument, proceeding more strenuously and firmly where he meets with obstacles than where he finds it soft and ductile and yielding. Now let us see how this applies to spiritual things. We are by nature cold and hard, and dead and shapeless, just as the marble in the quarry; and we have just as much power to raise up ourselves and assume a goodly shape as those miserable stones. It must be the voice of God by the Spirit quickening us that we can do it; and there is a diversity of feel-

ing in the human race ; some are harder-hearted, more obstinate, more impracticable, others more soft and tender and pliable and impressionable. The only difference, therefore, in the hands of the mason will be, that he will be obliged to employ gentle means in the one instance, and rough and severe measures in the other ; and so we find it. There are souls that seem to have such an aptitude for truth, that they seem to receive it almost by intuition ; and there is such facility in leading them, that their delight is in following directly they know the way, and all their life it is so smooth and gentle, that God sees it needless to use harsh measures. There are the St. Johns, and Polycarps, and Nathaniels, and the Howards, and Neffs, and Oberlins of later times—all seems to prosper with them, because they lean only on God, and have such clear views of his goodness and wisdom, that it never enters into their heads to doubt either. These easily take the impression designed ; a

few strokes of the hammer gradually given, a little paring of the axe, an occasional eye to the stone, that the vermin eat not into it, and that the moss or ivy grow not near it, which even the most polished stones are exposed to, and the master builder looks on them as his most finished work; and they that are the strongest and clearest and purest of them, God will make pillars in this great and noble temple. (Rev. iii. 12.)

But there are others, whom God is forced to deal a good deal more roughly with. Take but his eye off for a few minutes, and the work is to be done all over again: it totters from its machinery, it is unsteady, and is rough in the grain: it easily chips: it turns the edge of the axe; it is gnawed upon by creatures that undermine its strength.

Now, if the master builder has marked out and chosen this stone to be one in the temple, pains will be taken to correct this; for it is not in the discipline of this

workshop to reject lightly ; it is only after everything has been tried, and in vain, that it is thrown on one side as useless. The stones taken, and the stones rejected, are from the same quarry, dug up at the same expense and by the same hand, and over the entrance is carved in large letters for each stone to see—"Consider the rock whence you are hewn, and the hole of the pit whence you are digged ;" and this is to make and keep them humble ; for it is not of works, but grace, from beginning to end. God's temple must be built on one foundation stone, Jesus Christ, and all must be of the same materials, the same beauty : and if any man build on this foundation, be it gold or silver, or precious stones, according to his estimation, or, as it is in God's, only wood, hay, stubble, God will overthrow it by fire, and it is only the stones that he has prepared and laid together that can stand that test. Works of human merit may wear a fine aspect to the eye of fallen

man, and shine as gold and silver and precious stones, that the fire cannot touch ; but when the flame of judgment is lighted, will the wood and hay and stubble stand ? No, they will be burnt and consumed, and their ashes be driven away with the wind. But the stones of the heavenly temple are lively ones, and they are part of a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, where spiritual sacrifices will be offered up, acceptable to God by Christ Jesus. The chief corner-stone is laid in Sion, or God's throne in heaven, elect and precious, to which all come and are built up ; and though it was disallowed of the builders, and is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to them which stumble at the word and are disobedient, yet to them who believe it is precious — O ! precious beyond calculation—and all the redeemed are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone, (that cannot be too often

repeated, for there is none other foundation that will stand,) “in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord, in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.” For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, “I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” (2 Cor. vi. 16.)

And now the stones are all prepared, none wanting, all shining in order and beauty and harmony. It had been the glad employment of the royal David, during the more chastened period of his blessed life, to collect all the costliest materials for the gorgeous temple that his son was destined to build, and seven years it took to complete it; and when all was built, the glory of the Lord descended and filled that house: and now the temple is in ruins. The day has been, as prophesied by the Redeemer, when that goodly temple, again restored, has been over-

thrown ; scarce any traces of its magnificence remain in its ruins ; one stone remaineth not upon another. But the temple that God the Father has planned for God the Son, has taken him thousands of years to collect the living stones with which to build it, and yet it is not completed. It has been the aim—the single aim of all creation, the one thing to which everything has bent ; it was what Satan, with single-eyed malice, has for all that time endeavoured to subvert, but not one stone has he been able to injure. The rejected ones that would not harmonize, that would not adorn the glorious house, the worthless ones, those that were good for nothing but to be broken and pounded, he has had for his pains, but not one living stone has been left out. The building is in perfect symmetry ; it is cemented by the blood of Christ ; he is the foundation, and he was laid in eternity ; he is the topmost stone that is raised with shouting, and every living stone has a voice of

triumph, and cries, " Grace, grace unto it ;" all grace from beginning to end ; the defilement of the quarry all gone, for God has made each stone white, and has written a new name in each, which no one knoweth saving he which hath received it. (Rev. ii. 17.) And if such was the glory of the first temple, that after its dissolution, on its rebuilding under Ezra and Nehemiah, (those were ancient men that had seen the first house,) when the foundation of the second was laid, men wept with a loud voice to contrast it with the former, whom the prophet Haggai thus reminded : " Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory ? and how do you see it now ? Is it not in your eyes, in comparison of it, as nothing ?" And yet, poor and mean as it was in ornament and grandeur to the first, still, because it was the one into which the Lord Jesus Christ should enter in person—he the Word made flesh—the desire of all nations—who dwelt among us, and his glory

was beheld—the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, (John i. 16,) it was declared by the lips of the Lord of hosts himself, that “the glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, and there will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts.” And if now a second time the temple is laid in ruins, and still so lies; yet it was considered more glorious than the former, because the Redeemer had visited it in person. But if it still deserved that title, though he, when he came, was reduced to all the limits of poor and suffering humanity, doomed to death, and dying as a felon—O what will be the glory of that temple made without hands, eternal in the heavens, whose living stones have been elected in eternity and prepared in time, which are all united to one body, to one foundation-stone, supporting one head, having one object; and which, when stone and marble and iron and adamant shall pass away—shall be strong as eternity, and

last for ever ! O, who can tell the ravishing beauty of that temple of which God is alone the builder, the fairness of that city compact with itself, that it has been his plan to build, and which he completed—nothing wanting, the mansions all filled, the fold round every sheep ; the plant not missing that has felt his hand to rear ? O there is more than this : the Father has honoured us in calling us his temple on earth, his living stones, and deigned to dwell among us, and fill us with his glory. But in the consummation of all things, the climax of all that is most conceivable in beauty and splendour and proportion of blessedness, even that eternal temple shall lose its name, and be swallowed up in one that is not created, but creating ; for there shall be no temple in that golden city, “for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it ; and the city had no need of the light of the sun, nor of the moon, to shine in it : for the glory of God did shine in it, and the Lamb is the

light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it, and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it, and the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day, for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it; and there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." *

* In the majestic ruins of the temple of Jupiter Serapis at Pozzuoli near Naples, the fine and stately columns, nearly thirty feet high, are nearly destroyed, about eight or ten feet from the basement, by a species of tepedo, or shell-fish, two inches and a half long, like a pointed muscle, which eats into the very centre of the column. This temple was in ruins in the time of Augustus, and yet the sea is now considerably lower than the basement. As these shell-fish could not have committed their depredations except carried and deposited there by the waves, the only way to account for it is, since, as they would never build a temple of such gran-

deur where it was exposed to the ravages of the sea—that by some volcanic power, of which there are traces at every step you take, the sea for a time must have covered that tract, and perhaps might have caused the overthrow of the temple, the columns of which, and pavement, alone remain. There are warm springs close by, and the rooms for the bathers are still perfect.

THE END.

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